

Lights and Shadows

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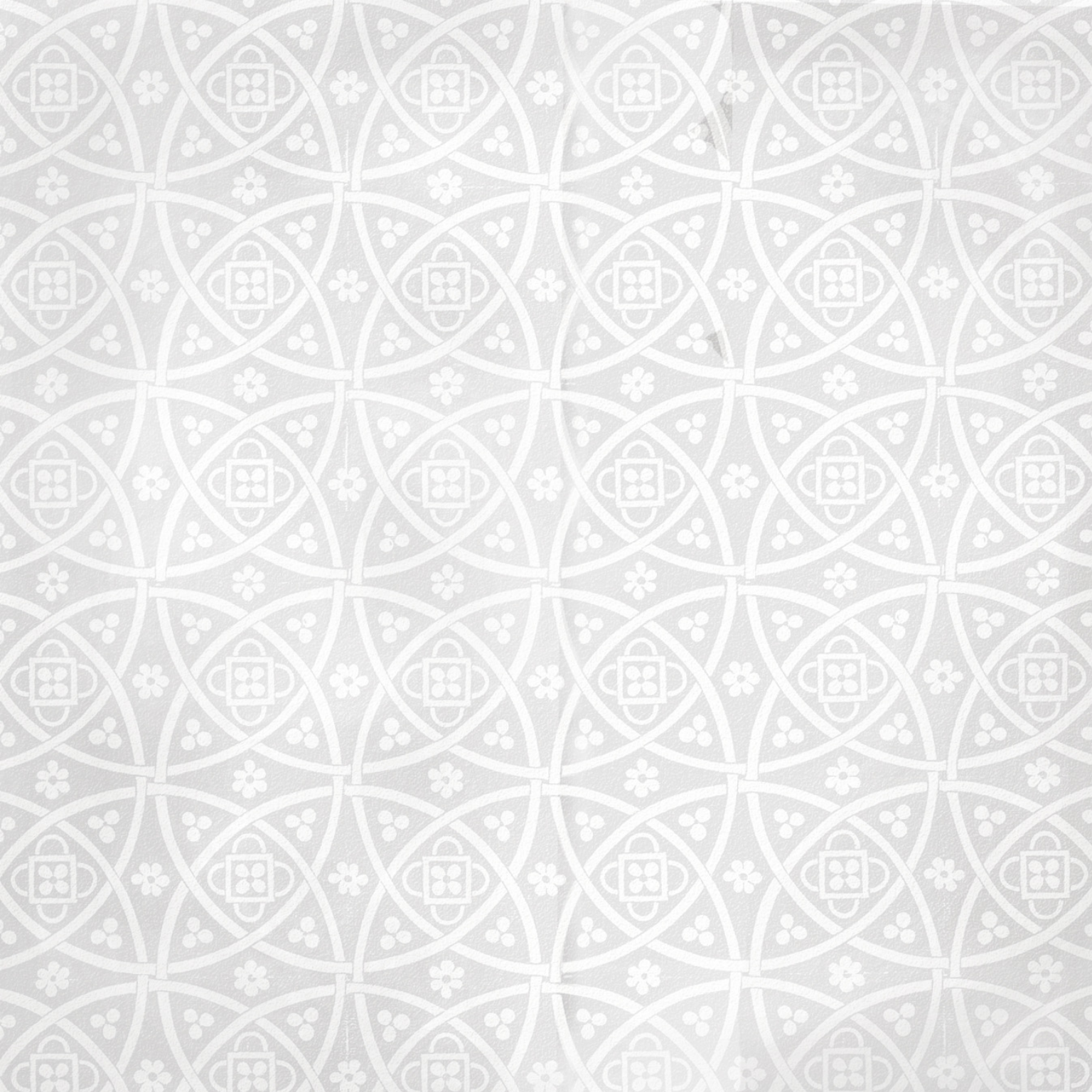


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Lights and Shadows 2010
Art and Literary Magazine



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Florence, AL 35630

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When Mr. B asked me to be the editor-in-chief of this year's edition, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I wanted this year to be different and a turning point for the magazine by giving it a fresh look; yet remain true to its diverse acceptance of students' submissions which make Lights & Shadows unique. The first major change was the shape of the magazine. It was agreed that the "traditional" rectangle shape would be replaced with a more contemporary square. Another noteworthy inclusion was including an interview with Lorraine López, who also gave a fabulous reading during UNA's 2010 Spring Writers' Series.

As for the excellent literary work, I'm proud we had the opportunity to showcase the poetry of one of UNA's international students, Sijia Yao, in both its original language, and in English translation. Significants by Lisa Anderson and Broken Little Bluebird by Matt Mallard are two pieces of poetry the reader will especially enjoy because one addresses lost love and the other tells the intriguing story of Effie through the eyes of various family members. Camp is Crap by Zach McMasters is a humorous short story of a camping experience gone wrong. Uncle Pete, Visions Through a Window Pane, and Half-Truths are more serious and force us to reflect on the demons we wrestle against. There are many other noteworthy pieces and I believe there is something for everyone to enjoy.

This year has been bittersweet for me because it was my senior year at UNA. I got to see firsthand the joys and struggles of

Editor's Letter

selecting pieces for the magazine, laying it out, and the behind the scenes efforts it takes to put something like this together. I am grateful for the opportunity of being this year's editor-in-chief and was privileged to work alongside some of UNA's most talented students.

Zach, Brett, and Candice, thank you for keeping me sane; I have learned much from each of you. Ellen, Ginda, and Matt, thank you for providing different perspectives and ideas. Robin, where do I begin? From our initial meeting about designing the look of the magazine, we clicked and you got exactly what I envisioned. This edition would be nothing without you. To all of the students, please continue to submit your works for publication in Lights & Shadows. There would be no magazine without you and your desire to share your works with the public.

Mr. B, thank you for having confidence in me and pushing me out of my comfort zone. This has been one of the most frustrating and rewarding experiences I have participated in while at UNA.

To other English faculty: Dr. Mauriello, Dr. Koch, Pam Kingsbury, Dianne Dodson, and Anita Garner, thank you all for helping me along the way and for encouraging me to pursue my dreams.

Lastly, I would like to thank you, the reader, for your continued support of Lights & Shadows. The magazine would cease to exist without its readers, and it is my hope that this year proves to be the best read yet. So pour yourself a cup of coffee and enjoy!

Jillian Tomberlin
Editor-in-Chief

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A Voyage Into A Transitional State
Brett Leslie

My mind is blank. I've been staring
at a white screen for thirty minutes
without any luck. some days my words
come out like word salad and
some days I have philosophical ideas,
and other days like today, I merely
exist. No creative juices flowing through
my extremities.

Maybe it was the bottle of wine
I had earlier, or maybe it was
the trite news article
in the campus newspaper. But
until I started typing, I was lost. Not
destitute because of a college education
but a sight for sore eyes. a faulty pixel
on a computer screen.

Untitled
Susan King



2nd Place, Photography

Silence

Brandon Richardson

Silence is a stranger who sits too close,
A sad-eyed friend,
A melancholy meter man
Whose vague existence is solidified only by the bill.
Silence comes quietly like dew at morning,
And hides itself in the footprints left.
Silence screams reverberating truths to the mind
While subtle lies drip from the lips.
Silence is born from the realization that often in life
Acceptance is the only change we are afforded.

The Cry
Rene Anderson



2nd Place, 3D

The Orbiting Vessel
Chelsea Lawson

*“WE DANCE ROUND THE CIRCLE AND SUPPOSE, THE SECRET SITS IN THE
MIDDLE AND KNOWS.” –Robert Frost*

I shift my weight to one side as I prepare to read the morning news. My wooden porch swing I purchased from the Amish last week makes for a comfortable reading setting. The kitchen table is still piled with miscellaneous boxed items that I’ve been planning to sort out for weeks after moving. I’m in no rush. There’s a world outside my doorstep with fresher air and a river nesting a bellyful of fish. I’d much rather be casting and reeling than sorting and organizing. With my glass of V8 Splash in my hand, I spread out the morning paper across my lap.

I was never a front page reader. The bleeding lead stories put a damper on my day. I also never appreciated the fact that stories are treated as less important if they do not occur within a fifty mile radius of this small quaint town. Anything outside of this range comprises a four or five line blurb on the corner of the back page. These are the stories that I often search and fill in the blanks to counteract the brevity of its coverage. Today’s concise story’s headline reads: *Ottawa Father Drowns Despite his Daughter’s Efforts*. It goes on to state that

the father and daughter were at a Ramada Inn swimming pool when the father, injured from a fall off of a diving board, lost consciousness. The daughter jumped in to save him but nearly drowned herself. The father died and the daughter was later taken to the nearest hospital.

I pause at the punctuated period at the end of the page. Is this all that can be said about the traumatized daughter? It is all that can be printed in black and white anyway. The public still needs to hold down their Cheerios while going about their everyday crises of petty inconveniences or overbooked schedules. I set the newspaper beside me on the porch swing and close my eyes. It is my father that I hear calling to me. “Jump in,” he yells. I imagine the Ottawa father telling his daughter the same thing when they first arrive at the pool. It is unfortunate that my sweet memory of swimming is not reciprocated in hers.

I remember the chlorine puncturing my nose as I neared the counterfeit blue’s surface. The orange balloons encircling my forearms gave me the wobbly gait of an awkward fledgling. I lowered my 4’2” frame to the water’s edge. Concentric circles diffused from my stubby finger.

Test.

“Jump in!” Daddy yelled.

Being the third child, I was not an egg carried delicately on a spoon like my

older brother and sister. A band-aid could cure any ailment and so could a hickory switch if needed.

Daddy stood in the center of the rectangle, engulfed mid-waist by this monster. His legs looked as stumpy as mine from the elevated ledge.

“Go on, Chelsea. It won’t bite you,” Mama said, unfolded on a beach towel and peering over her Ann Rule book. I questioned their consensus until his arms outstretched, waiting for my leap. No more hesitating.

Splash!

Daddy looked down at the carrot marshmallows swallowing my upper limbs. “Why did Mama make you wear these? Water dogs like us don’t need floaties,” he said grinning as he slipped the bulky contraptions off, freeing me into the water’s embrace. I kicked my legs like good water dogs do, but quickly began to sink.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got you,” he assured me. “Just relax.”

He supported me with both hands under my belly, extending me out into the blue liquid jello, tethering me to safety or the illusion of it. I stopped my struggle with gravity and became parallel to the water’s white cemented base. I was weightless.

Accepted.

Equal.

The sun peaked through the clouds, piercing holes through the water's surface and absorbing into the fabric of my black Mickey Mouse bathing suit. There was no leniency from the jealous sky whose breeze was kept locked tight, only to be released for little girls who paid visits with their flying kites.

"It's hot, Daddy," I said, furrowing my brow as I peered up at the relentless sun.

"Oh, you're hot, eh? I can change that." He grabbed my left arm with one hand, my left leg with the other. "You wanna see how a motorboat moves?" he asked. I nodded my head and he slowly rotated me around him in counterclockwise circles.

"They start out verrrry slllloooowww liiike thisssss," he rumbled in a deep voice. "Then...." he paused. I anxiously waited. "They go real fast!" he yelled, swinging me around and around, his body, a pivot, my body, a motorboat whirring across the water at top-notch speed. I laughed uncontrollably as waves sloshed against the tiled edges of the pool. He stopped just in time to maintain equilibrium. When we caught our breath, the water quelled around us, I looked up at my motorboat conductor and saw my reflection smiling back at me through his black metallic shades.

I open my eyes and look back down at the rolled up newspaper. Is this how the

daughter in Canada's day began? Was it just as similar to my own recollections? I imagine that the six year old girl was just as tentative of the water as I was, her throat constricting when she thought of submerging her face under the bottomless liquid. She probably stood on the ledge and waited for her father to come up behind her, already soaked from his dive off the board, and make his best attempt at coaxing her to join him. I imagine the Ottawa father was much like my own, who made every attempt to show his daughter that the water was harmless, only his last method was a fatal one.

I closed my eyes again and imagined him walking behind her, around the pool's perimeter, and stepping back onto the diving board as the girl envied his fearlessness. I'm sure she watched him as he bounced: Once, twice, three times. Did she know that would be the last time she saw her father smile at her? As his foot slipped from underneath him and his head bounced off the concrete shelf of the diving board, did she blame herself for not jumping in earlier?

I imagine the girl looking down at her father lying at the pool's foundation, his arms stretched in front of him as if he were reaching for her. I hear her shrieking, "Daddy! Daddy," as she looks around and sees no one but herself screaming on the reddened surface of the water.

Was it the realization that she was utterly alone that made her plunge in to

fight the water's depths? I wonder if she sank to where he was and touched him one last time before everything went black.

What was it like for the girl to wake up in a bed of asylum white, staring up at her mother without her father at her side? Did she study the pain nestled in her mother's eyes and see through the synthetic smile painted on her face? I imagine the little girl asking, "Where's Daddy?" and her mother realizing that she can no longer obscure the reality of safety for her daughter. I clench my eyes and see the mother grasping for her daughter's hand and kissing her cheek. I hear her whispering, "Daddy's in Heaven."

I jar myself and realize that I am still clenching the newspaper in my hand. The next day I feel compelled to drive across town to the setting of my fondest memory of my father. I stare fifteen years later into the same swimming pool that my father and I became the conductor and the motorboat. My reflection stretches across the water's midsection, transformed from how I remember it as a child. I walk the pool's perimeter. The depth that once daunted me seems somewhat laughable as I stand at the site of the entrance where I took my first leap. I hear the splash my body made the first time I dove into my daddy's arms and see the waves sloshing like the insides of a washing machine as we spun like whirling dervishes. The water floods over me with this memory. I stare at the vibrant blue and can't help to wonder what the little girl from Ontario sees. Is

the pool just as ominous as she remembers it? Are the waters just as red?

Fathers must prepare their children for the moving currents of life. Sometimes those currents can circulate understanding, leading to memorable experiences and unforeseen adventure. Other times, the undertow can pull you under, drowning who you were and resurfacing you as someone lost in struggle to survive. Despite the precarious unknown, a father knows that his job is to prepare his children. His power does not reside where the waters flow downstream, but he is there for the first submersion, sink or swim. I reflect on what my father has taught me: how to ride a bike, how to skip rocks, how to ward off bullies, and most importantly, how to swim. I wonder how much of that I would have learned on my own. Did the Ottawa girl teach herself any of these things? It is with a leap my father cradled me, and it is with a leap, her father taught her how to cradle herself.

Lavender and Chamomile

Erica Brown

Your tiny head rests on my shoulder,
your arm limply drapes across my chest
in slumber after your bath.

It is a comfort -
this small weight in my arms,
this light pressure against my torso.

You sigh in your dreams and
I lean my cheek against your head to
inhale your lavender and chamomile
thick dark hair, tan skin.

I say a silent prayer for you,
my little man.

And you rest, unaware
of the world.

One effective way to remove the pain from a painfully embarrassing experience is to find the humor in it. Here's what you do: place yourself in the body of a neutral witness. Slip your feet inside their shoes and innocently wiggle your toes about. Then, once you've accomplished this, allow your essence to flow up through the hypothetical body and into the brain. Think *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* without the pods, it's easy. Really, in order to achieve significant psychological relief, force yourself inside the minds of those heartless, depraved, insensitive individuals who laughed at your expense when you accidentally shit yourself at 4H Camp. Then it all becomes humorous and less of a pain in the ass of your memory. Right?

I'm not exactly sure why I wanted to go in the first place. Maybe it was because my friend Elliott was going (or, rather, was being forced to go as part of his well-rounded Christian development) or because I was fascinated with tornadoes and debris or because the brochure offered fun, craft-oriented activities involving sheets of metal and multi-colored pipe cleaners. Or maybe it was the knock-off slip 'n slide set up on the side of a jagged mountain, er, smooth and pastoral hill that caught my attention. Nature trails, rain dances, homemade ice cream, watermelon, swimming pools--all things enticing to an

ignorant ten-year-old who had never spent more than a weekend away from home. Once the necessary paperwork was completed, a chore reserved for my apprehensive mother, I would be at camp for five days and nights, eating only three times a day. I would be away from the seclusion of my dimly-lit, Transylvanian bedroom, absent from the comfort of my stiff bottom bunk-bed, and denied the luxury of a private shower.

Allow me to digress and elaborate on this whole communal shower business to which I was unaware beforehand.¹ Truthfully, I didn't bathe the entire time I was at camp (unless you want to count the two occasions I reluctantly stuck my big toe into the bone-chilling water of the not-so-Olympic-sized pool; water which I'm certain must have been drained from an Arctic iceberg). How could I when the running gag was to sneak into the large, open bathroom in groups of four and yank open the cheap, flesh-colored nylon curtains to the dismay of the naked boy inside the shower stall? I mean, I was modest. I couldn't get comfortable with the threat of exposure and the thought of being caught, naked and wet, with my hand in the crack of my ass feverishly

¹ Communal showering, a relatively modern form of Medieval torture, provides the male adolescent with an opportunity to realize that not all dicks are created equal, thus elevating one's self-consciousness or pride, whichever applies.

attempting to remove stray soap suds.

So, with the time I would've spent showering with my body cowered in the corner of the stall (think Carrie White being stoned with tampons), I walked around the bustling campgrounds with Elliott, made crafty do-dads, and ritually popped my first round of harsh antibiotics due to a lovely case of strep throat I was trying to overcome. For five days.

It must have been about the third day of camp when the tragic event occurred. Elliott and I were walking back to the cabin from washing dishes at the cafeteria when I felt my bowels scream from within as if they had accidentally spilled and impaled themselves on a large, jagged nail. I stopped, instantly breaking out in a sweat of hot fear. I asked myself, *What do I need to do right now?* I held my breath for a moment, feeling every inch of intestine inside my body expand and contract, swell and release. Against my better judgment, I decided to keep walking and ignore what was happening inside my body. I could play it cool and make it to the bathroom without having to sprint like a gazelle. However, once my feet resumed their course, a fart blasted its way out from between my cheeks. Elliott immediately began to laugh. Farts always got a rise out of him, even if they were fake as in

a rip-roaring game of Make Me Laugh. I, however, knew that something was terribly wrong and terribly moist in my pants.

“Oh shit,” I said aloud. “I think I just crapped my pants.”

Elliott laughed even harder, his face red with heat and glee. Then, a momentary look of concern which could have been mistaken for an epileptic seizure seized his face as he looked me in the eye and said, “No you didn’t.”

“Yeah, I think I did,” I said to him with the naked trust that only the best of friends hold sacred. “I mean, maybe I didn’t, but I’m pretty sure I feel something mushy in there.”

His sagging, freckled face instantly lifted as he released an untamed wail. His head thrown back, arms lifted at his sides, hands limply dangling at his face, he was Stimpie in top form.

“It’s not funny, man! I’m sick!” I shouted as I began to mechanically strut toward the cabin.

How I handled this stinky situation from that point seemed quite reasonable to me, given the circumstances. I casually walked into the vacated cabin, took a clean pair of underwear from my bag, and slipped into one of the shower stalls to make the switch. Luckily the Naked Brigade was off duty for a

while, probably crawling through the air ducts in the girls' cabins with cheap Halloween masks from Wal-Mart. They certainly would've gotten an added bonus had they barged in on me. I tossed the soiled pair of wears into the trash and made my way back to the assembly hall where some new-age hippy lesbian holding a candle talked about the life of a penny for two hours while my undies grew stale in the cabin.

When I returned from the emotionally-riveting speech, now with a deeper appreciation for insignificant American currency, all hell had broken loose. There in the hallway, like a lower-lip herpe, was my dirty pair of underwear, exhumed from the wastebasket, with big, stupid Mean Kid Isuckalot (a.k.a. Drew) standing over them, laughing hysterically and waving them about as they dangled from the end of a flimsy tree limb. I could hear laughter coming from the others who had returned from the assembly in the next room.

The moment was surreal in the most frightening of ways: extreme close up of Bully Bastard's wrinkled, freckled face, laughing in warped, demonic tape speed, branch rising in the left portion of the frame, underwear steadily coming into

focus. Cut to my face as my frightened eyes slowly lift from the floor to Heaven above (*God, why?!*), mouth agape, hands rising to my cheeks, fingernails leaving four bright red streaks as gravity pulls them downward. All of this in slow motion, of course. Though that's how the initial reaction should have occurred (for it was worthy of an Academy Award), I was frozen. The only thing I could do was stand there in the doorway, eyes focused in on my name written on the elastic band of the ruined Fruit of the Dooms. Thanks, Mom.

Petrified, I watched as my dirty drawers were slung across the hallway. It didn't occur to me then, but now when I ponder over this event from time to time, especially in moments of panic or rage or constipation, I think to myself, *What kind of a sick kid would do this sort of thing--wander into the bathroom, probably to jerk off between crafts, investigate the contents of the trashcan, and willingly remove a soiled pair of underwear for amusement?* I mean, I did many years ago walk in on a pre-school colleague smearing shit all over his forehead in the bathroom for no apparent reason. Perhaps this was the same boy, now fat and mean and on his way straight to the fiery furnace of Hell.

Snapping out of my paralysis, I stomped down the hallway, carefully picked

up the briefs, and headed for the door on the opposite end which led to the outside of the cabin, keeping my head down and dismissing Drew for a badly-crafted statue covered in bird shit. I did my best to remain calm and collected despite the laughter, but that effort was shot to hell as I lost all composure in a moment of desperation and flung the ruined pair of underwear over the chain-link fence. Unfortunately, they didn't make it to the ground on the opposite side. Instead, they got caught on a protruding piece of metal near the top of the fence, an all-too-perfect fuck up to enhance and prolong the experience. Great. Now my crusty pair of briefs would blow in the summer breeze like one of those bright, tacky yard flags old ladies use to welcome the holidays.

Feeling utterly defeated, I shoved past the crowd of chuckling onlookers and walked back inside, hating everyone and hoping they'd die instantly or get eaten by the penny-loving lesbo at the assembly hall. I crawled into bed like a poisonous vapor and pulled the covers over my head. The shame was intense and so was the remnant anger in my disgruntled bowels. Unable to seek the proper relief, I somehow managed to fall asleep and stifle the overwhelming embarrassment while contemplating the many possible ways I could destroy

Drew's life forever.

Luckily for me, the gods had been sated at my expense and chose to dump on some other poor soul that night. I awoke to the sound of laughter, at first thinking Drew had perhaps constructed some sort of sock puppet with my underwear and was putting on a show. Then I realized the laughter was not intended for me. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief as I was informed that the weird bony kid had gotten his dick stuck in a hole in the wall and was hyperventilating.

I returned from my stay at camp with relatively little scarring. Though they sympathized, my parents found the story to be quite humorous and didn't mind exploiting my tribulations to their friends at work.

"Oh, come on. It's funny! You gotta laugh at yourself to make it less serious. I've shit myself plenty of times!"

Once again, thanks Mom.

My dad opted for a more pictorial approach at comfort. One day while lounging in my room, basking in the glow of a black light, he opened my bedroom door after working away at the grime on the tires of his truck. With a smile on his face, he lifted a pair of greasy briefs from his back pocket, held them out, and said, "Hey, they mailed your underwear home from camp."

Thanks, Dad.

Untitled
Zach McMasters

god,
.
x .
e .
o .
l .
p .
d .
e .
d

母亲•那个时代
姚福昌

她并不知道她为什么哭泣，
也许她也从未能指望：那么多，
令她失声的哪怕她可以看个模糊，
哭泣只有越来越浓重，她知道，
但她还能怎样？

也许她只是想在那些间隙里
抓住孩子们的牢固，但这一个
却令她对另一个放手，她少女般的抗争
在黑夜与石头下迷路，唯一能说的，
像人们说的，她只是胃疼。

Mother · That Era
Fuchang Yao, Translated by Sijia Yao

She never knew why she cried,
Nor did she expect to reason it: so much,
Nor could she see it even if vaguely.
Only more intensely would she cry - the only thing she knew.
But how could she solve the riddle?

Maybe she just attempted to grasp her children firmly in the breaches, but
While holding this one, inevitably she would lose the other.
fighting like a girl, she was lost in darkness and in stone,
The only thing she could articulate is,
As others observed,
Stomachache.

Note: This poem is about China 1960's - 1970's

Callyn
Haley Doss



1st Place, 2D

Alndone

Rene Anderson



1st Place, 3D

Life

Brandon Richardson

Life is,
A continuous,
Outwardly normal
Inwardly emotional
Constant battle
Within oneself
That's impossible
To win,
And unacceptable
To lose.

Lorraine López: A Reserved Storyteller
Jillian Tomberlin

Lorraine López is of Chicana descent and has had several books published within the past few years. Her books range from collaborative essays to a young boy's coming of age.

Some of the themes Dr. López addresses in her books are poverty, bi-cultural relationships, loss of innocence, racism and struggling with cultural identity, and surviving setbacks.

Dr. López obtained her B.A. from California State University, Northridge; her M.A. from the University of Georgia; her Ph.D in English from the University of Georgia. She is married and a mother of two; Dr. López is an associate professor at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. In an interview with Gabriela N. Lemmons, Dr. López stated that some of her influences were Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, Cristina Garcia, and her mentor, Judith Ortiz Cofer.

Dr. López's characters are intricate, emotional, and struggle to overcome cultural and economic obstacles. She uses her life experiences to develop her characters and relate to the reader regardless of the reader's background or age. Dr.

López addresses each topic with such compassion that the reader is engaged and reads with anticipation to see the characters and plot develop. She is a warm, caring, reserved individual who loves to share her passion of writing with others. I highly recommend any aspiring writer to read Dr. López's works as they bring imagination and compassion to the page.

J. : In our women's literature course, we've been discussing how important family is to authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Kelly Cherry. How has your family influenced your work?

L. : I come from a family that values the narrative form in storytelling, gossip, and jokes. My father's side of the family, in particular, is exceptionally verbal. Among my thirty-some Lopez cousins, only a handful of these are male, so women tend to dominate storytelling sessions. In our family gatherings, stories tend to be performed, rather than merely told. My aunts and cousins use elaborate gestures, various voices to portray characters, and much inflection to punctuate emotion. Again and again, I am exposed to hilarious and often outrageous stories from my relatives, and my father himself is quite the joke-teller and narrative weaver, though he doesn't always understand that good

stories should have a point. With such a family, I doubt I could have been anything but a storyteller. But as a reserved person, I tell my stories in writing, rather than acting them out at a family functions.

J. : In your interview with Curbstone, you were asked:

Q. Do any of your personal experiences make it into your book?

A. I often write about incidents that have happened to me or that I have heard about from family or friends, and I invent characters and events as well.

Has using your personal family incidents ever backfired for you? Have family members or friends been upset that you used them in your stories? If so, how did you handle that?

L. : Oh, absolutely, this has been a problem for me, as it has been for other writers. It's such a recurring dilemma that my good friend and fellow writer Joy Castro is compiling an anthology of personal essays by writers who have grappled with repercussions from writing about family, and I have submitted a piece for that collection in which I discuss various and surprising reactions from family members to encountering versions of themselves in my stories.

These have ranged from delight to anger. One of my cousins who recognized herself in an unflattering portrayal was provoked to write, and she is now producing essays about her life that she shares with me. Another cousin I've written about has not spoken to me in over eight years. My children have also struggled with me writing their experiences, and my son asked me never to write about him, which I take to mean: If you write about me, be sure to disguise the character so that I don't even know myself. I confess I have not always handled this type of conflict well. Harry Crews says that if you are a writer and you have a family, someone in that family will have a problem with what you do. This is true. And it's taken me an exceptionally long time to figure out which stories are mine to tell and which are not.

J. : During the Spring Writers' Series at UNA, you mentioned "cultural currency," what advice would you give someone who was struggling with their cultural identity?

L. : My best advice is to articulate that struggle in one way or another, to discuss it openly with those you trust or to write about it. Once a person can fully express struggles with cultural identity, it becomes easier to understand

the

kind of impact it has on one's life, whether this struggle emanates from class, gender, ethnic, or religious difference. Naming the struggle and putting it into words can help bring the problem into sharper focus so it can be dealt with in a proactive and direct way.

J. : How important do you think student literary magazines like *Lights & Shadows* are for young writers?

L. : Such literary magazines are absolutely essential as early venues for publishing work. I will never forget how validated I felt as an emerging writer when *The Northridge Review* at California State University, Northridge published my early stories. When these appeared in print, suddenly I was writing for readers other than myself. People were reading my work, thinking about my characters and their experiences, and this was wonderful to me. Though I have never been on staff for a student literary magazine, I have worked as assistant to the editors at *The Georgia Review*, so I know that working to produce a literary magazine affords an invaluable experience for emerging writers. Reading submissions enables writers to understand what the

playing field is and to see ways in which to improve their own writing.

J. : What advice would you give to aspiring young adult novelists from your experiences?

L. : I would advise such writers that writing for children and young adults is the most challenging type of writing there is, and one should never enter into it because he or she feels unready for producing mainstream literature. Young readers have zero tolerance for undisciplined writing—dull stories, inflated language, lazy editing practices, and superficial characters. I would also stress that writing for young adults is in not a forum for derivative genre writing. Basically, this type of writing is in no way a shortcut for writers who don't feel up to the challenge of writing for adults. So my advice: Develop your writing skills to the best of your ability and then find out if you are good enough to write for the toughest readers around.

J. : While at UNA, you stated it took you approximately 10 years to get

your first book published, any advice for students seeking publication? Should students seek publication with an established publisher or are new media tools, such as blogs, a better way to go?

L. : Sorry to be terse about this, but student writers ought to focus on learning the craft of writing, not publication, which happens when the work is at such a level that other people will be interested in reading it. Again, there are no shortcuts. Nowadays though, it does seem easier than ever to see one's words in print, but that is not the litmus test for success as a writer, as I see it. My fifteen-year-old nephew publishes an online sports journal. If you write a solid piece on a high school baseball game in Dallas, he will likely post it. But does that make you a published writer? Technically, I suppose it does, though it will not necessarily bring you closer to being the kind of writers most students aspire to be, the kind of writers they read and admire most, those who have inspired them to step up and write.

J. : What's your favorite food dish? Would you mind sharing your recipe?

L. : My family is from central New Mexico, land of the mouth-excoriating chili peppers. My favorite New Mexican dish is chili relleno. This is a stuffed chili dish that one prepares by roasting green chili, peeling it, slitting it open, and stuffing it with a stick of Monterrey jack cheese. Then it is coated in a cornmeal batter and deep-fried. Drain excess fat from this delicacy and cover it well with even hotter red chili salsa to serve immediately with many glasses of cold water. Enjoy!

A Pissed on Toilet is a Pissed off one
Rhiannon Clarke



2nd Place, 2D

Cowing a Hero

Ginda Folkerts

When I was seventeen, I questioned everything I was presented with. “You lack strength of character,” my father often said. I was, to him, a sinful girl, a weak vessel, I had a huge problem with being compliant, obedient, respectful and ladylike. I, however, doubted in the usefulness of these much extolled ‘virtues,’ and frequently said so. He got mad every time I expressed my opinion, “I don’t want to be like the women in the Bible!” How heroic was it to spawn children till you died, have no say in common law, to be cowed

into submitting to men’s judgment, to be nothing more than property, no better than a cow? He hated my independent, cynical way of thinking and promised me the fires of hell. The strength of his punishments, he thought, would curb my defiance. **HARDLY.** I considered myself a hero, overtly questioning his biblical interpretations of justice, law, judgment, right and wrong with huge words that my father didn’t have in his vocabulary. His face always seemed stern, red, and mad. He found my relentless and varied arguments insufferable and expressed his fatherly doubts

cruelly, “You’ll never be anything more than a whore!” Me? A whore? The boys I knew highly doubted my desirability as a woman. They despised my lightning wit. I was unrelated to the cow-like girls, with their goo goo-eyed adoration of those pretentious pricks. The girls thought I was mad, “How can you NOT think men are **WONDERFUL?!’** I didn’t have friends. The acerbic strength of my tongue, and my perpetual refusal to keep my opinions to myself left me with a huge lack of enjoyable social interaction. I read books instead. I believed I was like my favorite heroes:

bold, brave, daring, dauntless. I was ready, also, to pay the consequences a hero must pay: to be misunderstood, friendless, forsaken, left with severe self doubt on many occasions, wondering if my search for knowledge and truth was worth the huge price it seemed to extract from me. My mother cried so often that year. She, loving and gentle as a cow, thought it was her fault I was incorrigible. She thought my willful, oppositional strength to stand shouting, as a man would, toe to toe with my father a sign of either madness

or possession by the devil. “Can’t you just pray for God to help you do his will? It’s madness and a love of evil to resist!” she’d plead. She couldn’t understand me. I cried too; sure, I was a hero but I was so tired of fighting ignorance, irrationality, tradition – the brutal, unnatural strength of puritanical faith that my parents possessed. “The Scarlet Letter” refined my rhetoric of doubting into a machine. I was only silenced by his jarring slap to my face. They finally cowed me into submission and docility after they took away my books. My depression was huge,

drowning out even the numbing rage I felt when my father threatened to burn them in a huge pile. They were locked in the attic instead. I thought, “This must be how insanity and madness begin.” But my fortunes changed! A “good girl” from church got pregnant, and the dumb cow’s mistake made MY little insurrections seem positively angelic. That poor, knocked up kid was my hero; her downfall my reprieve. My books were returned with certain conditions. My candid doubts in my father’s God must be silenced. I gave in. I hated the situation with passionate strength,

but I wanted my books back THAT bad! Silence was hugely difficult. That demanded a heroic effort. If I could manage to ignore my father's madding belief system quietly and keep my doubts to myself, I could do anything in the world. I'm not a dumb sheep or cow. I'm a woman of strength.

"My Little Hero"

Elliott Sullivan III

She fell
Into the water.
She can not swim.

Good God—
At this moment,
I'm her 'little hero.'

Pump.
Pump.
Blow.
G A S P.

She falls
Under my spell.
She can not resist.

Good God—
At this moment,
I'm her 'little hero.'

Stalk.
Stalk.
Push.
S P L A S H.

"Cliché"

Joseph Carter

Tonight, I want to come home
to a room lit entirely by a
thousand white candles—
and you,
wearing only a pair
of ratty, old jeans,
holding a bowl
of chocolate covered strawberries.

I want to watch the candlelight
play across your skin
as we softly chuckle
and enjoy the sweet taste of the fruit;
I want to feel the soft heat
from the flames
as my shirt is pulled away
and that flawless smirk flashes across your lips.

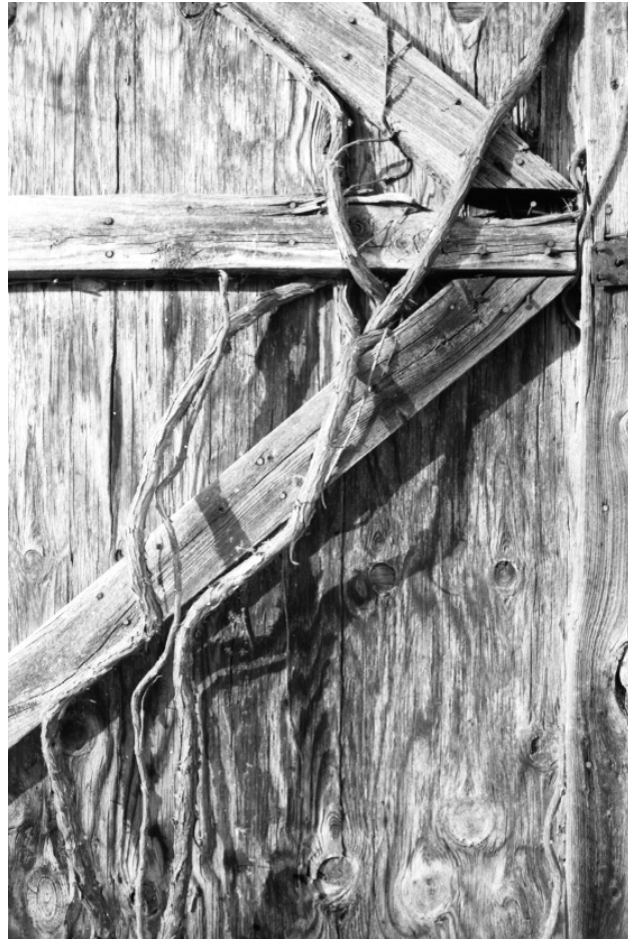
I want to feel your breath against my neck—
and your scratchy, stubbly cheeks.
And I want to feel your lips,
soft and warm against my ear,
as you whisper your desires
in a rough, lustful voice.
Then I want you to lead me toward the bed,
to carry out those dreams.

Bedtime Stories (Portrait of an American Family)

Mark Lanpher

My father never told me
About the time he made my mother
Stand against the kitchen wall
Grab on to the silver towel rack
And do pull ups.
She had just given birth to my brother
So blood ran thick between her thighs
As she struggled to lift herself up
And become pretty again.
Nor did my father tell me
About the time she took his gun
Pointed it against her head
And told him how sad
How miserable she was.
She was hoping for change
Or some sort of miracle
He just smiled
And dared her to pull the trigger.

Untitled
Susan King



Merit Award, Photography

Nair-Death Experience

Zach McMasters

I was one of those lucky youngsters to begin puberty at an early age. When I was in the fifth grade, I remember displaying my newly-sprouted armpit hair to my friends who lacked such premature masculinity as I.

“Check it out. Testosterone, mmm hmm.”

Poor souls. They’d catch up eventually.

However, this feeling of superiority gradually faded as I grew into my teens. I began noticing how often I had to shave, which was a great deal more compared to most guys my age. My neck was (and still is) in a constant state of irritation, and before long I found myself yanking hairs from places I felt they shouldn’t be. Pompous ass.

Suddenly, I was eighteen and had arranged a date with Pretty Q at the skating rink, the dilapidated yet retro-classy Foot Steps. I felt as though I needed to be smooth in more ways than one. So, I hopped into my red Cavalier (the Cockmobile, as it was later to be dubbed by my future pill-popping Barbie boss at Spencer Gifts, the only rock star I’ve ever known), drove to Wal-Mart, and purchased a bottle of Nair for Men.

When I got home, I glided in phantom-like fashion to the bathroom without saying a word to my parents. I didn’t want them to inquire as to what was in the plastic shopping bag, nor did I care to explain if they happened to notice. I took off my shirt and began reading the directions on the label.

As I recall, I was to remove the rolling apparatus from the top of the container, unscrew the plastic cap underneath, twist the roly-thingy back into place, and squeeze a liberal amount of the rotten-granny, cucumber melon scented goop on my chest in a thick and even layer. So, that's what I did. I then waited ten minutes for the stuff to take effect, all the while thinking of the magnificent reaction I'd get from Q upon witnessing my new, bare, perfectly pre-pubescent white chest. Confident ass.

As I was sitting on the toilet waiting for the Nair to work its magic, I began skimming over the "don't do this" list on the label. My eyes happened to rest on one, singular statement in bold type: **"DO NOT APPLY TO NIPPLES."** My heart collapsed as my eyes instantly darted from the label to my nips, covered in a thick layer of man-eating lotion. Shit. Oh boy. Oh shit. My thoughts were overwhelmed with visions of carnivorous oil-slicks, slowly devouring the flesh of their happy-go-lucky summertime victims. Skin dissolving, eyes melting, skeletal hands reaching helplessly toward the sky, pleading in vain for quick release... The visuals were too much, and I began to panic. I immediately stripped off my clothes and scrambled into the shower.

A funny thing happened once the warm jets of water hit my chest. My nipples, without warning, burst into flames. I was terrified, naked and wet with my teats ablaze. My shrieks of pain must have reached the ears of nearby coyotes, for a distant howling ensued and became the perfect accompaniment to my ear-

shattering cries. Had Brian Eno been standing outside the bathroom window with a mini-cassette recorder, I'm sure he would've wept with joy and achieved an immediate boner.

"I call it 'Music for Exorcisms.' Another ambient concept that I'm certain will liven up that house party you're throwing this weekend. Needle on the record!"

An unexpected, fervent knocking at the door interrupted my nude dance of death.

"Are you okay in there?" my mother asked, probably thinking I had finally inherited her knack for blowing up the toilet six times a day.

I yanked open the shower curtain, and a rush of cool air slapped my chest with such brute force I felt as though I had been reprimanded by a red-hot nun wielding a frozen ruler.

"Oh, ye-ea-h" I shouted in mousy tremolo. "I just, uh, I just slipped and banged my knee really hard on the metal bar thing here. I'm good, thanks."

"Ah, okay," she replied, accepting my lie and ignoring thoughts of all the weird things which could be taking place in the bathroom. "Well be careful. You're kinda fragile, kid."

Once I heard her footsteps gradually fade along with her laughter, I attempted to remove the Nair from my chest as quickly as possible, splashing water all over the place like an A.D.D.-afflicted child playing with a garden hose. I grabbed a washcloth from the edge of the tub and wiped the remainder of the Nair from

my skin. At this point, I didn't give a damn whether or not it had done the job. I was too concerned with my scorched, throbbing nipples, now harder than an elderly man with a prescription and completely white.

After gently patting myself dry with a clean towel, I looked at myself in the mirror. Scattered areas of my chest were bare but covered with tiny red spots that itched and burned like an alcoholic yeast infection. Other areas were plastered with crinkled, brittle hairs, flaking off with every shift in movement. The charred remains of my nipples were white except for the very tips, which were blood red and pulsating with every beat of my defeated teenage heart. I soon discovered, to my cynical amusement, that the only comfortable way to wear a shirt was to pinch and pull it away from my chest. My parents' eyes never strayed from the television screen as I strutted through the living room on my way out, flawlessly executing the Madonna cone-bra impression.

On a brighter note, the date at Foot Steps was more successful than the actual preparation beforehand. After thoroughly explaining the details of my recently-diagnosed condition, pectoral cancer (advancing at a rapid pace, six months tops), and the grueling chemotherapy treatment I had just undergone, Q looked at my raw, splotchy chest with sympathetic, hungry eyes and said, "Mmm, let's have sex."

Somewhere in the night, coyotes howled and Eno bowed as the Cockmobile swayed to and fro.

Allison
Susan King



1st Place, Photography

Broken Little Bluebird

Matt Mallard

THE BOWL

I gaze at the middle of the table where the handcrafted ceramic bowl my Aunt Cindy made sits. She thinks in terms of acrylics and watercolors, as well as Homer and Faulkner. I am in awe of her range. She writes—poetry, mostly. She paints. She spins clay. I think, *I wouldn't mind having a piece or two*, before I move back to the egg-beaters and bowl of egg-whites. *I will make you into frothy meringue, and you will be the best and frothiest meringue there ever was*. My father stands at the sink preparing the turkey; Cindy is at the oven, supervising the rotation of casserole dishes as a skilled, orchestra conductor.

One of us brings up Aunt Effie. Her story always intrigues me. The last time I remember her as a topic of conversation, Cindy told me, “You can have it if you want it, Matthew. I’ve tried to write about her for years,” though the only fruit she managed to yield were the pears in her painting above the dining room table. “I give it to you.”

As I spread the meringue over the bowl of banana pudding, I am suddenly aware of bowls. I imagine Aunt Effie’s husband sprinkling the rat poison over a

bowl of cottage cheese and peaches when he intended to kill her. I imagine her dropping a bowl of buttered corn on the floor when she learned her siblings tampered with their father's will to write her out. I imagine her pouring water from a porcelain pitcher into a basin in the 8'x12' room she occupied at the Elgin State Mental Hospital throughout her life. I imagine her blowing through contoured lips on a simmering bowl of soup as she shared the bar with her brother (my great-grandfather) and her great, great-nephew (my father) at a cramped diner before she ventured back out into the bitter Chicago wind—her entire life in a shopping cart.

I toss the dirty bowl in the sink, *Pudding's done*, and smile at Aunt Cindy. She threw the clay on the wheel for me; all I had to do was shape it, glaze it, bake it.

THE FARM

(The speaker is Effie's brother, my great-grandfather.)

Even before my sister married her first
husband, our lives were plotted

from a Cather or Steinbeck
novel. Ellis Island welcomed our

father from Denmark when he was 12.
His family settled in Illinois,

and he married a girl with
similar roots. My parents survived

the Depression with six kids on
a farm, hidden from the dirt

highway by the towering stalks of corn,
their slender forms swaying in the

southwestern wind off Lake Michigan
like the last day I walked home from school

after quitting so I could work the farm.
I remember that farm, divided between

our four siblings after they finagled Papa's will
[the land now victimized by sprawling suburbs].

I remember the unharvested corn, shining
like flutes of champagne

in the red and purple tones of dusk. Then
the night sky, brighter than all

of the downtown theatre marquees.
I remember how it felt to sit down

to a family dinner after a disheartening day
and pray, and be thankful

we were alive. But mostly, I
remember Effie's smile as she

skipped from the pond, to
the woods, through the corn

twice her size, and up
to the front porch. I hoped

she'd always be as happy

as she was then.

SUSPICION

(The speaker is Effie's first husband.)

Piece of trash

they call me

Can't keep a job

Good for nothing

Bad for Effie

maybe so, maybe I

spoon-fed her

rat-poison

laced lies, like

the light bulb

Hitchcock wired into the glass

of milk in *Suspicion*

maybe Effie knew
 I was in the business of delivering

light bulbs on a tray—
 she had time

to think about me
 when I left her

for dead,
 my bags waiting by the door,

her savings tucked away
 between button-ups, rolled trousers,

and a shaving kit
 The Ultimate Houdini:

/disappear/
 \reappear\

somewhere else
 as someone else.

BLUEBIRD

(The speaker is Effie, my great, great-aunt.)

I am a broken little bluebird,
tried to throw my hatchling from the nest.
That's why I'm here. Again.
In the mental hospital. [mad house]
Who tries to throw her daughter from a window?
Madmen in the streets, in the towers,
mental cases in the madhouses—
the undisclosed side-effect of the American dream.

Madmen follow brick roads, pace the towers.
They think just because I'm in here, they're safe
from the side-effects. Americans dream
to be talented, to be something special.

But because I'm in here, they aren't safe.
All I wanted were the rainbows, the triumphant ending,
but I had no talent; I wasn't special,
no Judy Garland, for sure.
I want all the fuzzy voltage crashing/clanging in my skull;
that's why I'm here again.
I'm no Dorothy Gale, though. Be sure,
I'm nothing—just a crumpled, silly, mad little bluebird.

THE DINER

(The speaker is Effie's 10-year-old great-nephew, my father.)

I picked and pried at the cracked, hard, laminate counter. It glared its red
eyes back at me like the woman on the other side
of my grandfather. She scared me a little. Grandpa had said

You may not recognize her, she probably won't recognize you, but keep your head.

It's still Effie. Two years ago, Aunt Effie baked enough Christmas pies
to feed all of Chicago. This was not the same woman. I'd been misled.

Her shell's gaze met my eye, and I believed to see a small thread
of familiarity. Huddling into her coat, threads unraveling, she dismissed me with a sigh.
To her, I wasn't any different from the strangers in the corner booth; she'd

forget me just as soon as she started to like me. Pancake platter drenched
in syrup and a refill from the waitress [sandpapery voice and funny makeup], she tried
to clamp a cigarette between her cherry lips while asking if we were well-fed.

Effie neglected her shopping cart outside long enough to bow her head
in her plate, never looking at her brother, even when he almost cried
for her distressing situation, for her crushing circumstances, for the life she might have led.

Instead, back out the door, away from the security of the diner, to the streets—dead
and devoid of any distinction between right and wrong. I weighed the different sides
of blind justice that night: on one end, I recalled the parable of Job I had read,

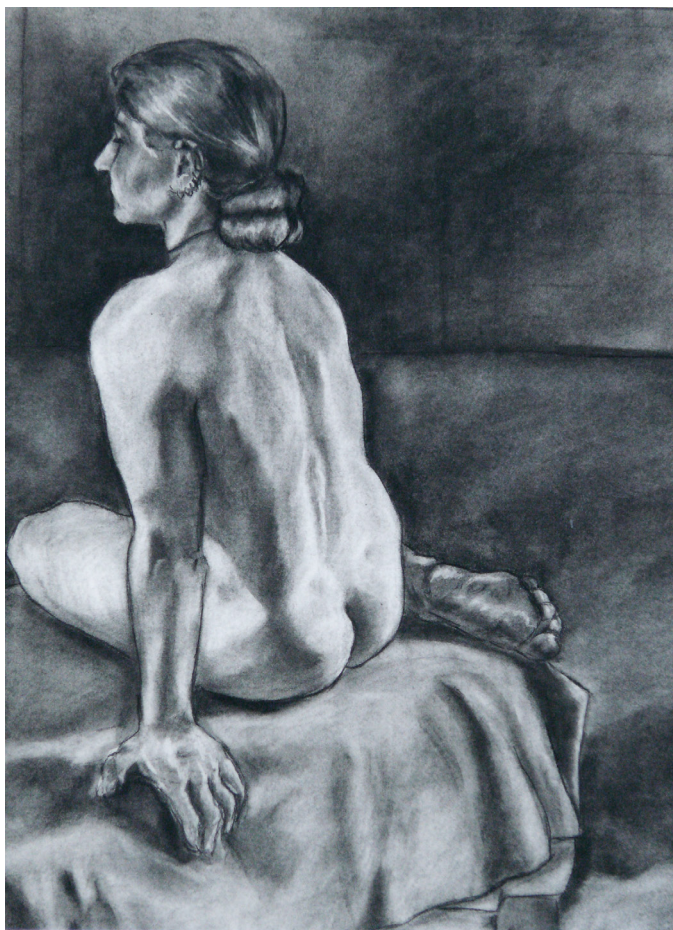
the other was Aunt Effie, stalking away in the direction of the park, Hershey's
and energy bars in tow, as if nothing with her brother had been left unsaid.

Goat's Song
Robin Barrier



Best Of Show, Assemblage
Art Faculty Award

Female Nude
Christen Pilkinton



Merit Award, Charcoal Drawing

Wasted Memories

Brittany Walker

You were a friend
Someone I could chase across the playground
And follow up the monkey bars

You were a pal
Someone to help me put worms in my big brother's bed
And snicker when he ran down the stairs
Not once suspecting his innocent sister and her best friend

You were an alibi
Someone to hold down the fort
When I rebelled and went out for the night
Someone to take the heat when it mattered most

The moment of weakness arrived
You stepped forward
I leaned into your masculine embrace
Everything blurred
As your warm lips found mine

We are no longer friends
Conspiring companions no longer exist
You became the reason I needed an alibi.
As I sit here waiting to be seen
by a strange man in a white coat
I wonder how you and me
Became Baby and I

Complete The Strands

Jill Tomberlin

Julie Andrews starts singing “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” and I realize that my cell phone is ringing. “Hi, Mom. Yeah, I’m in Birmingham. If there’s no major traffic I should be home by six.”

“Well, just be careful. The dishwasher is leaking water so we may have to do dinner on paper plates. Oh, when you get here, will you PLEASE talk to your brothers and sisters about tying off the popcorn strings before they put them on the tree. I have gone into the living room twice and noticed the popcorn is falling off the back of the tree because the strings aren’t tied together,” says my exasperated mother.

“Yes, Mom, I’ll take of care it if I have to do it myself. Sorry about the dishwasher, paper plates won’t matter. See you soon. Love you.”

It’s a family tradition of ours to hand-string popcorn to decorate the tree. It usually takes a couple of days to complete the strands but it’s something our family enjoys doing together. As I drive north on I-65, I remember all the popcorn stringing races we had and all the sore fingers growing up. I don’t understand why my siblings aren’t doing it correctly but figure it will be easily fixed when I get home. As for the dishwasher, it is going to be nearly impossible to get a repair man out since it’s only two days till Christmas. My mom believes family events and holidays are special. So special in fact, paper plates are prohibited.

I am eagerly greeted at the door by Jordann, my younger sister who is nine months pregnant. My siblings and I chat incessantly, catching up on everything that has been going on over the past few months. I bring up the issue of the popcorn and they insist that they have been tying it off. My twin brothers, Jonathan and Joseph, request my help in changing out a fuse in one of the Christmas tree light strands. It is quickly changed and the lights are still out.

“Hmmm, Mom, I think we need a new strand,” says Jonathan.

“Well, crap, that’s one more thing to get tomorrow.” My mother seems even more irritated than this afternoon. We enjoy a nice dinner and everyone’s off to bed.

The next day is uneventful. The new lights aren’t as important as Mom had once thought. The dishwasher is still leaking water and Dad decides to turn the water to it off. It’s about eleven o’clock; Jordann can’t sleep and has decided to stay up wrapping presents. She is sitting on the floor in front of one of the plaid wing-back chairs. The seven-foot pine tree is directly behind her and the brightly colored packages are spread out over the pale blue carpet. My dad is snoring loudly on the brown leather loveseat. Jordann has just finished wrapping a present and placing it under the tree. As she begins standing up, she notices that one of the rocking horse ornaments is swaying back and forth. She

then notices the entire tree is swaying back and forth. All of a sudden, a large brown rat crawls out of the Christmas tree. Jordann gasps and jumps into one of the chairs. “Dad, dad, wake up. It’s a rat!” Unfortunately, Jordann is so scared all she can manage to get out is a slight whisper. She finally finds her courage and awakens our father who is still in a stupor. The rat is now in front of the entertainment center which is directly in front of Dad. The rat stops and stares at Dad; all he can do is stare back. By the time Dad realizes what it is and what is going on, the varmint has run off. Meanwhile, Jordann has been so scared that she starts going into labor.

“Pam, Pam,” my Dad yells for my mother. “Take care of Jordann and get the boys up! We’re going rat hunting!” By this time there has been such a commotion the entire family is up. Dad and the boys immediately begin hunting for the rat. A thought dawns on Dad and he pulls out the dishwasher. “Aha! This is why it’s been leaking.” We all run into the kitchen. The rat had chewed into the plastic water line and had been drinking water from the top of the dishwasher. My mom and I look at each other and realize it’s the rat that has been eating the popcorn which untied the strings. We run into the living room and begin pulling the popcorn and all edible candies off of the tree. It’s then that we discover that the rat chewed through the strand of lights which

had mysteriously gone out.

Some time later, Jordann's contractions have subsided and our poor Christmas tree looks naked. "Why don't we vacuum one more time," I suggest. "I think I might sleep better." The house has been scrubbed from floor to ceiling since Mom wanted to be sure the rat had nothing to nibble on. The house is as clean as it could possibly be — the floors were swept and mopped twice, the carpets vacuumed, and any boxed foods were placed in sealed containers. Dad and the boys dig through the boxes in the garage and begin setting traps; however, the only traps on hand are mouse traps. It is soon discovered that these will not work. It is decided that we should all go to bed and not worry about the intruder. On Christmas Eve most people dream about sugarplum fairies, but we all dreamed of the Rat King.

Christmas morning we all get up and open presents. It's another family tradition to watch a movie after the sacred event of opening presents. We all gather in the den and pile onto the couches, loveseat, and oversized chairs. All of the sudden Mr. Rat dances across the kitchen tile floor to the dining room; however, we are even more shocked as he is accompanied by another rat. Grossed out, we girls scream as Dad and the boys run after the oversized rodents. It would take another three days of setting rat traps before they would

be able to kill them. Even then, the rats were too large for the traps. They would be caught and then the boys would finish them off with golf clubs.

After the incident with the rats, my parents unfortunately agreed never to string popcorn again. They didn't want to risk feeding anything else that might sneak into the house uninvited. Yes, it was a pain at times to string the popcorn, but I have a lot of fond memories of us kids doing it. Our new tradition seems to be laughing at our recollections of the "rat Christmas" and how my niece, Chloe, was almost born a Christmas baby.

Charleston Baggy Horse
Christin Pilkinton



Merit Award, Painting Acrylic

A.A.A. (Holy Hypothetical Hairbrush)

Elliott Sullivan, III

Moses had a cowlick.

Moses had a cowlick,
Standing straight atop his crown.
Moses had a cowlick—
His ass? Laughed outta town.

All is revealed in time.
Every fool gets wise.
Gold calves to golden arches,
And the Bible's a best-seller.
That crazy bastard got his revenge.

Moses had a cowlick,
Standing straight atop his crown.
Moses had a cowlick,
Yet no blood upon his gown.

God(less)

James Ryan

THE ABYSS

On my side of time
From my unwavering image on the moving water,
I could not see clearly the meaning of my father's gesture.
Was he safe or was I? Or, were we each in peril?
We entreated each other to cross the abyss,
our only protection from one another,
as a sign of faith.

The void coveted every nick of pain and
tortured every moment of joy that struggled to live in the shadow.
Though we may walk hand-in-hand, his indulgences used up
my belief was that his Godlessness had always been mine.
We each had tried to remake ourselves into what the other was not.

Were we here only to learn from this corporeal torment?
What creature's plaything were we?

He tells me about things he did in his monastic life, but
they amounted to nothing more now than soul-less chores;
not for spirit, but as tasks to an end.

We had been doing our duty, he to be something he knew he was not,
and I to deny what he really was and to be what he wanted me to be.
His would not happen in this life.

MY FATHER'S GLIMPSES OF HEAVEN

drink and each thing he thought
to do in this world was his flight from consciousness.
Here, it was his punishment to feel, and ours.
He would not deny this.
Beauty would radiate from him for a while
after he returned from those times when we had the chance to laugh.
We wondered where he had gone, what he had seen, and why he didn't stay?

When he made it to that other side,
leaving us with his pain and anger,
he would bring back, like treasures of
the way things could be and how.
If we could live there and here at the same time
we would be with God.

Each story was a presence, no past of pain,
no future to fear and question. Like a Williams poem,
pictures of simply being and how, on which,
so much depends.

A Cold Side of the Bed

Brett Leslie

Spinning on the hardwood floor like a warped record, I'm drunk and hungry for the lovely sprawled on my bed. We met earlier that night at a bar in downtown Sheffield—the taint of the tri-cities area, the watered down Steel Reserve version of Pompeii. It's a city of yard sale ruins, riding the coat tails of The University of North Alabama (TUNA).

We hit it off with casual small talk. She asked me about career options involving my degree, and I explained my exasperation toward public education teachers. Due to an acute distaste for macaroni necklaces, portable classrooms, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

She fancied my aspirations to be a writer, and goal to combine the holy trinity of characters Raoul Duke, George Costanza, and Charles Bukowski into one entity. She order us a round of Pabst Blue Ribbon and furthered her interrogation:

“Why do you write?”

“Out of fear,” I said. “Fear that I'll become a cookie cutter copy submerged amongst the Pillsbury bourgeoisie. Fear that my degree in English will attract a job in advertising. I write to pay off my student loans. I write to channel the fear that one day I'll have a stroke, become mute and unable to use my hands.” She whispered in my ear: “I'll give you something to write about,” and tabbed out.

Seizing my hand, she escorted me to a dark stairwell shoved in the corner of an alley. We hid behind a dumpster and enjoyed a bowl of kine bud. Narrowly escaping the eyes of an elderly woman disposing her trash. Spring was in the air as she petted my groin and planted her tongue down my throat. She insisted we go to my place and without hesitation we bolted for the car.

At the apartment, she unveiled her work of art hidden behind a zebra satin strapless dress, to the score of a dirty river jazz band performing on the streets. She wrapped her legs across my back like an octopus and bit my chest hard enough, that morning revealed bruises.

And a cold side of the bed.

Castilla De San Marcos
Michael Redding



Merit Award, Photography

Uncle Pete

Lauren Abroms

Each time I visit here
I lay my rock down next
To the rock that marks where
You lie
making my own Wailing Wall
remembering your little nuances.

The one I remember most is the smile
That always spread across your face
even in the end.

Yesterday your sister showed me
the pictures of Auschwitz
that you took during the War.
You wrote back telling of the
Horrors you'd seen.

You always liked to remind us of our fortune,
how our family escaped that
madness.

Today I looked at the picture
of you and me

me grabbing for
a cookie out of the jar. You held
me in arms that were juxtaposed
perfectly to my fat stubs.

Skeletal
like the prisoners pictures with one extra addition
that smile.

By this time you'd been fighting
your own battles
completely different from the Second World War.
Chemicals
Flowing into and out of your system
supposedly killing the disease.

When you finally lost, people
lined up past the entrance to Temple
Beth El paying their respects.

Mom still has the fern you gave
Her to plant in our front yard
And each year it blooms we sigh,
laugh, and think of you.
Knowing your spirit is still here.

It's 11:15, and his trailer's hot as hell. Garth Freely isn't feeling well; however, interestingly enough, he's not feeling 'not well' either. He isn't really sure how he feels. All he knows is that, right now, he needs a beer...or six. Stumbling to the refrigerator in nothing but a pair of old, torn boxers, he's relieved to find that it's stocked with PBR, as always. Getting laid off after ten years of management duty hadn't made for a good day, but his psychologist, Dr. Pabst, was about to make it all better.

Making his way back to the recliner, he considers his options: a miserable night of Judge Mathis, a miserable night of Nascar, or a miserable night of no TV at all. Laughing at fact that he even considered the last option, he plops down into his off-brand La-Z-Boy, not minding the butt-imprints from its pre-Goodwill owners. Pressing the power button and popping the top off his first bottle, he's ready to escape reality—even if just for the night. As the tube warms, and the picture slowly appears, he gladly welcomes the rumbling of engines. Yes, Nascar's on—his favorite way to spend a relaxing night in front of the tube. His worries begin to fade—eyes glued to the television—genuinely impressed with the sheer power of the cars, and their ever-amazing ability to make left turns. He's so immersed that he doesn't even notice the growing pile of empty bottles at the base of the recliner. By the time he does, he's too drunk

to care. Wobbling his way back to the fridge, he hopes he hasn't drained his resources. After grabbing another ice-cold antidepressant, something comes alive within him: an idea—a wonderful, stress-relieving idea.

It had been hanging there, staring him right in the face, the entire time. He can't believe he didn't think of it before. If it's one thing he's proud of, it's his Southern heritage. After all, he didn't park his house in the beautiful hills of Alabama for nothing. And he knows good and well that if there's one thing a true Southern boy (and any respectable Southern girl) loves even more than Nascar, it's their gun. Lifting Mrs. Luanne from her rack, he feels a tear begin to form in his eye—this is going to be a beautiful, beautiful night. Gun in hand, he throws on the old wife-beater he'd worn to work, slips on his shoes, grabs all his empty bottles, and makes his way towards the door. But the sweet, alluring action of the race draws him right back in. Eh, it's almost over, he figures...gotta know who wins.

“Garth...Garth...GARTH! OH MA GAWD, what are you doing?” Dianne, Garth's wife, stands at the front door. She remains motionless as she stares at her now unemployed husband, sitting there with a beer in one hand and a shotgun in the other.

He simply points to the bottles, back to the gun, and smiles. “Oh, babe, don't

worry. I was just gonna...”

Becoming sympathetic, yet still cautious, she takes a few steps towards him. “Shug...everything’s going to be just fine. Why don’t you just put down the gun, and I’ll go in the kitchen and cook you up some Spam and grits—I’ll even put Easy Cheesey on ‘em, just how you like it!”

A little confused, he figures she’s just worried about him making a mess of the bottles. “Well, good God, there won’t be too much of a mess...I’m going outside. I figured you’d rather have something blown to bits than just sitting around the house all the time.”

Tears begin to swell in her eyes. “Garth, baby, you listen to me, ok? Yes, I would rather have that *something* sitting around the house, because I love that *something*. It’s going to be ok. You don’t have to do this. Sure, you spent ten years at Lady Margalese’s Adult Video Emporium, but it’s nothing to kill yourself over—you still have me.”

She continues to attempt to reason with him, but the alcohol has already gone to his brain. He’s way too drunk to understand her concern, and way too drunk to care. As he grows increasingly frustrated, it begins to happen—the same thing that always happens when he’s drunk. Hateful, vindictive thoughts begin to swirl through his head, and he’s reminded of just how much he hates

his wife—standing there, likes she’s better than him, ruining his night. But this was the last straw. Tonight, Garth has the gun. Tonight is Garth’s night. He angles his shotgun down, pressing the barrel directly between her eyes. “I’m going outside. I think I need some fresh air.” She nods, silently, remaining motionless—minus the slight quivering of her lower lip.

It had always been her nervous tick. No matter how strong or courageous she tried to appear, that one lip always gave her away. It was the same lip that had given her away on their first date. It was there, that morning at the Shoney’s breakfast bar, that he had fallen head-over-heels for those brown eyes, curly orange hair, and blue-frosted lashes. Nevertheless, that was then and this is now. He’s laid off, he’s drunk, and he’s pissed. It’s time to settle the score.

Pushing all the positive nostalgia back into a deep, forgotten corner of his mind, he becomes increasingly passionate about his plan for revenge. He debates with himself as to where he should do it. In the woods, maybe? Out in public? The sound of his marriage breaking apart, he imagines, will be so much sweeter than the sound of those bottles. Wherever it ends up happening, he knows it’s time. He had caught Dianne with almost a dozen guys, just in the past week. She had sworn, that morning at Shoney’s, that her prostitution days were over—he should have known better. It was time to end it all, but not

here...not now. With one quick jab, the butt of his gun puts her to sleep.

She's been out for hours when light finally begins to creep back into her eyes. The blood running from her temple clouds her vision, and all she can see is wood—everywhere. At first, she panics, thinking that Garth has left her in the woods to die. However, she's quickly relieved by the sight of ZZ Top posters and plastic-coated furniture. It isn't wood she's looking at—it's wood grain. She knows these walls well, and these walls know her. She's beaten, gagged, and tied up at none other than 'Killer' Clay's. Clay, secretly one of her clients, has been Garth's best friend for fifteen years. Wanted in five states for hate crimes, he's the go-to man for guns, knives, traps, and grenades. As long as you don't wear a tie or ride a bicycle, he'll hook you up with any weapon you could ever need to skin your cat...or your wife. Her lip, though now numb, begins to quiver once again while they examine the workings of what seems to be a small game trap. She can't make out exactly what they're saying, but it can't be good. "This one right here's hand-crafted." He spits a small amount of chew out of his over-stuffed mouth. "Thirty-seven razor sharp teeth 'ill sink into yer leg like BLAM! Heh heh heh, guess you won't be knockin' on my door again after that, holy boy."

"Good God, Clay."

“Yep. A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do. I don’t get no damn privacy around here! I can’t even live on my own damn land in peace without some Bible-thumpin kids knocking on my door, trying to scare me with all their jibber-jabber hoodoo nonsense.” He looks at the ground, spits out a little more chew, and nods disappointingly. “It’s a damn shame, I tell ya...a damn shame.” His face begins to lighten up as he lifts the trap up into the air. “But not no more. I’ve taken care of that little problem...heh heh. Some call ‘em Mormons. Some call ‘em Jehovah’s Weetnaysus’es. But ya know what I call em? Dead!”

Garth begins to realize that he’s not getting his point across. “So this’ll teach her a lesson, right? Clay?”

Laughing so hard that murky drool is beginning to drip down his chin, he hardly hears Garth’s question. “Whew, boy I tell ya, sometimes I crack myself up. I call ‘em dead...heh heh heh...”

“CLAY!”

“Oh...sorry, sorry. Now what were we talkin’ bout again? Oh yeah, the trap—thirty-seven teeth just ready to bite. It’d take one of those tie-wearing pricks out before he even knew what hit him. You should wake up ol’Dianne over dere, and we’ll see if we can’t catch us one of them Bible-thumpers. If ya didn’t smack the gal around so much, maybe she’d be awake right naw.”

“It’s you that needs to wake up, you dumbass! It’s her I want to torture! Her I want to kill! Her I want to teach a damn lesson!”

A look more awkward than a middle urinal suddenly comes across Clay’s face.

“Woah, hoss! Wait just a second there...”

“No, I’ve done caught her sleepin’ around with half the damn neighborhood! I had to duke it out with ol’ Douglas just last week...and he’s seventy-seven! How much could she get, Clay?! Huh? Huh?”

“Come on now, Garth. She’s the best in town—everybody knows it. You can’t blame her, business is business.”

At first, Garth appears confused, but his face quickly begins to turn a shade of red Clay had never seen before—more red than the blood of all the witnesses he’d ever killed, and more red than the words of God they uttered during their final breaths. “Wait a sec...Clay, how do y...You mean you...”

The blood still clouds her vision, but what little of the scene she can see is horrific. He’s scattered everywhere—the ceiling, the walls, the floor, and all over Garth’s smirking face. The trap had fit snugly over Clay’s face, silencing his prayers (and apologies to ‘God’s gracious and holy messengers’) with a single ‘*Clap.*’ Garth’s face is ruthless—so pleased, yet indifferent. After wiping some of the Clay from his face, he grabs his wife by the hair and—dragging her

through the carnage—makes his way to the door. He’s frustrated, and he’s tired. Not to mention, she’d made him miss the last few laps of the race. Realizing that he was going to have to do it himself, he drags her back to the trailer and throws her onto the bed. The television is still on, casting an eerie glow—outlining his towering, bloody figure. Her lip quivers so violently that she can feel the gag moving.

“Alright, babe, it’s time for this to end where it all began—right here, where you destroyed our love. I bet you don’t even care, do ya? It’s all about getting your fix, isn’t it?” His voice begins to crack, and his face softens. “So, what? Am I just not good enough for ya?”

“Mmmmmmm...Mmmm...MMMM!” She desperately tries to mutter a few words, but it’s useless—the gag is too tight.

After untying her, he presses the gun into her forehead and motions for her to take off her clothes. “Alright, take ‘em off. Come on, hurry up. What...you’ll do it for Clay, and the rest of the neighborhood, but you don’t wanna do it for me? Huh? No, you take ‘em off...you’re gonna dance for me one mo’time before you go out. Come on, show me whatcha got!” She slowly unbuttons her shirt. Pausing, she looks directly at him, with tears in her eyes. However, he’s not impressed. “Come on now, honey...take it off.”

As she nervously steps out of her pants, Garth's face begins to soften once again. He lowers his gun, standing completely still, eyes fixed on her underwear. "Twent...twent...twenty-four?" Still gagged, she silently nods. "Gordon? What happened to Kyle Busch? Wait, did you get those for m..." Once again she nods—tears now pouring from her eyes.

Kissing her through the gag, Garth also begins to cry. It's all becoming clear to him now—he'd been so drunk, he'd forgotten what day it was. His boss hadn't told him to pack up and go home because he was loosing his job, but because it was his birthday. His wife hadn't been a whore, she had simply worked as hard as she could to try and make enough money to buy his beautiful birthday present, which he loved ever so much.

With Miss Luanne still in hand, they fall to the bed, locking lips so hard that they can hardly breath. Garth slowly slips his birthday present down his wife's legs, and throws them over his head. They land on top of the television, which is still on, providing them with enough light to make sure they both give each other very 'sincere apologies.' He doesn't notice though, his head's in the clouds. Rolling beneath the sheets with the love of his life, he can't remember the last time he was this happy.

He lifts her up, grabbing her by her waist, and kisses her even harder. After

scratching him gently across the chest with her long blue nails, she slowly backs away and motions for him to come closer. Before he even has time to make his way across the bed, she grabs him, yanking his body up to hers.

In the heat of the moment, Miss Luanne releases.

She's scattered everywhere—the ceiling, the walls, the floor, and all over Garth's shocked, emotionless face. For a moment, everything is silent—all but the occasional drip of Dianne from the ceiling, and down the walls.

He remains motionless, staring blankly at the stained walls. The room glows golden as the light from the television seeps through the 24's on his birthday present. He falls face-down to the bed, gagging violently, serenaded only by the booming voices of ESPN broadcasters, as static electricity pops across the last remaining memory of his wife:

“Tonight on SportsCenter: four-time Winston Cup champion Jeff Gordon and his wife, Brooke, meet with lawyers this week to begin filing for divorce. In a statement issued to reporters on Tuesday, Brooke stated that even though she has loved Gordon for the past seven long years, there some things not even love can fix...”

晚年的父亲
姚福昌

他发现他连逃遁也无可能，
既然有人的街道都跑动起来，
叫喊的人在街上走，
并且径直闯入摘走他最后一点羞辱。

甚至连怀疑也是惊惶的罪过，
他那么真心诚意地
为全部以往守定一种谦悔的态度，
那谦悔并不仅仅为取悦恶行。

Father in his old age
Fuchang Yao, translated by Sijia Yao

He found even elusion was impossible,
The street of people was running,
Boisterous people were walking,
They intruded straight inside,
Picked up his last piece of humiliation.

Even trepid suspicion was sinful,
So earnest and sincere,
He piously repented all his past,
Not merely to please the atrocity.

Note: This poem is about China 1960's - 1970's

Devastation

Haley Doss



Merit Award, Charcoal Drawing

Smoke
Craig Hurst



Merit Award, Photography

Wax Museum

Brett Leslie

a heavy flock of sparrows pilot down from a blue winter's sky,
past a grove of oak trees, plowing an unsuspecting jogger's
forehead. rendering it the texture of interstate rumble strips.

lonely. sitting on an aluminum Technicolor webbed
lawn chair perched on my porch, and smoking a cigarette,
I watch minimal traffic race down the street.

yesterday's newspaper lies unread in a trash bin
hanging from a light post. cloud decks stretch low overhead,
and the brick paved road is neglected. colored rusty red.

my reflection projects on dusty glass windows of
vacant buildings. i'm living in a ghost town. a market
where smiles have turned sour. a college town tucked
quietly on the banks of the Tennessee River, living
in past glories of number one hits like: *When a Man Loves a Woman, Respect, and I Swear.*

it's written on the faces of wandering vets. the agony
of mental and physical defeat engraved on the deep crevices

lining the forehead and faded tattoos dotting the arms. it rings
with voices strained from years of cigarette and whiskey abuse,
and sings echoes of dice thrown against cardboard.

this town frozen in time is a wax museum, slightly more over-
whelming than the Cook's Natural Science Museum and
bronze statues of W.C. Handy with a disproportioned softball
head, decaying in the courtyard outside the post office.

maybe The Black Keys recording their album *Brothers*
in Muscle Shoals will resurrect this town, but it's doubtful,
because UNA's University Program Council deemed them
too obscure.

the weather forecast calls for heavy alcohol, a chance
of forgotten recycling, and re-heated McDonald's fries.

Visions Through a Window Pane

James Ryan

I saw God when I was sixteen; coincidentally, it was the first time I tried LSD. It wasn't only me; Big Mike, Ron and Mexican Joe went along for the trip. It wasn't so much God, but the unequivocal knowledge that there is one, somewhere. We were starved for distractions and adventure in the big city, and each summer night some force made us yearn for the next one.

We had been caught numerous times on Holy Innocent's Church steps swilling Old Style beer, Chicago's favorite, and cheap liquor. Boone's Farm wine, Strawberry Hill specifically, was a new addition to our palate. As a musical group, we spent almost every hour of every day together, except when we went home to crash. On those steps we practiced the songs we played, some of them ours, but mostly covers. I could find a sound in anything I struck with my sticks and concrete had a snappy sound and feel for paradiddles and fills. Ron walked around with his acoustic guitar strapped across his back like Bob Dylan all day long. While Mike who played bass and Mexican Joe on keys didn't have their instruments, we all sang in surprising harmony. Often, the cops came and called our evening, moving us along as if we were crooning street junkies gathered on corners in the black side of town.

Father Pajak, the senior priest, who had grown tired of a lot of things including us, shaking his head as he approached, always suggested we join the

parish youth group; or, he could just tell our parents. He would be lucky to find someone among us who cared; but, Big Mike's Dad would kick all of our asses. He was a Precinct Captain and in those days you weren't getting anything from the city in the way of services unless you voted right, which meant for Daley, and you sure weren't getting any garbage cans. Chicago used the steel, 55 gallon kind that the garbage men wheeled around with one hand and tossed on the back of the garbage truck as if they were toys. Garbage men nowadays with their plastic cans and automatic lifters are a joke. Everyone who worked for the city was only a few degrees away from the Mob. Those goons put people in those garbage cans, and they were never seen again. So, Mike's dad scared the shit out of us and we understood that bringing trouble to his door was not good.

We wanted to "suggest" to Father Pajak that he watch his junior priest, Father Richard, who often drank beer with us. It was on all of our minds as we glanced at each other with the same thought. We didn't, though, not wanting to get Father Richard in trouble, just like we didn't want to get Big Mike in trouble or wind up in a garbage can. Father Pajak, hunch-backed and muscular, not one for conversation, his tight lips usually clamped on a burning cigarette whose smoke stung his eyes, mumbled unknowns through a Cheshire cat grin.

When he captured you alone, he always put his hand out and the handshake lasted uncomfortably long and warm and moist. We never really understood everything he said but we felt it came from the darkest side of the vagaries of human character; nowhere we were qualified to tread. Father Pajak, in his black, ash-covered suit was untouchable on many levels. Either way we turned, our fate was somehow eternal.

One summer night, in that same year, we were sitting on the school steps, next to the church, drinking beer and grab-assing. Big Mike was there, sitting like Buddha with a beer in each hand. We'd look at him when he did this until he noticed. He started perplexed, told us to "go fuck yourselves" and returned to the dilemma he pondered. Mexican Joe, after a few beers was always aggressively friendly and your struggle to get away from his bear hugs often became life or death. Mexican Joe had no Mayan blood in him; he was the biggest Mexican guy I have ever known. At six-four and 280 pounds, his laugh began with a scream in your ear since he was usually holding you off of the ground. Ron often strummed his guitar even as we talked, and our words followed his chords in key. A few others were with us, guys and girls, one of them being Sherry. She was older than us by a few years, long-legged and shapely. She gave you that coy look that was most interesting to the guys; "Imagine what I know," was what

it said to us. She lived across the street from the church above a boarded-up neighborhood store. During the evenings that she didn't come outside we gazed up at her lighted windows and wondered what she was doing. Each time her silhouette would pass the window everyone would stop talking. This particular evening was her birthday; we all fantasized at how she wanted to celebrate her 22nd birthday.

Father Richard emerged from behind the school, which meant he left the rectory by the back door, circling around a large grotto the priests and nuns used for prayer and contemplation. He was dressed in "civilian" clothes: no black suit, no white collar but a white polo shirt under a navy blazer, khakis and boat shoes without socks. He declined the beer offered to him and shrugged off our howls at his clothes. "We don't always dress in the uniform," he said. Father Richard was only about 28 years old and we could not figure out why he was a priest. He didn't smoke or threaten you; he drank beer and seemed to like people. One of the requisites for Catholic priests, as far as we knew, was a God driven disgust with the human race except when they left large amounts of money in the collection basket.

We told him this was a special night. "I'm 24," Sherry chimed in, giving Father Richard that look. Before we could open our mouths about her adding a couple

years to her age, Father Richard grabbed her around the waist, pulled her to him and full-mouth kissed her, right in front of us. We couldn't have been any more shocked if he had kissed us. After a very long time, he let her go, gave her that "imagine what I know" look and walked away. He glanced at us and winked, like we were all in on it. Sherry recovered after a few minutes of trying to get her face to turn back from red to normal. It wasn't embarrassed red, but over-heated red, like she'd run a marathon. Everyone just stood there looking at her and at Father Richard as he backed the priest's black Ford out of its parking space and drove away. Before we could say anything Sherry looked not at us, but through us, "I gotta go guys, thanks for the beer." She was gone and so were all our hopes. Ron said it for all of us, "Man!" His horse-hair flopped over the front of his hang-dog, horse-head as he strummed an off-note on the guitar. It was the first time I ever saw Mexican Joe lose his smile. She was just one more hope dashed.

In preparation for our involuntary, first youth group meeting we made our "connection" come through for us: four hits of Window Pane acid. Diego, one of the first Puerto Ricans in our neighborhood, grew up with us but spun off to join a local faction of the Latin Kings street gang. The gang never bothered us, probably because of Diego. He came around occasionally wearing his black and

grey gang sweater, making us wonder if it made us all a target of a rival gang, and he seemed to regret when we all left for home at the end of an evening. He would leave with us but not head toward home, but into the night streets.

We chose from a menu of hallucinogens; we vowed then to try them all through the empty summer evenings: Blotter Acid, Purple Microdot, Purple Haze, Magic Mushrooms, Peyote, Hashish, Opium – our summer was planned. We had smoked weed before, but this situation, youth group, required drastic diversion. For the novice, some advice: a whole hit of acid to yourself isn't a good idea. I took my one-quarter inch square piece of plastic-like red Window Pane and placed it on my tongue. It didn't dissolve fast and I was afraid I'd lose it between my teeth. It was more than a half-hour before anything changed.

Youth activities at Holy Innocents consisted of mass, Catholic's service, which then adjourned to the parish hall for music and such to sooth the savage teenage mind. Little did they know the condition of our minds. "Holy Shit!" I shouted and ducked walking up the front steps of Holy Innocents Church. We hadn't even gotten into the church when the concrete saints above the door pointed and threatened to pee on our heads as we passed underneath. Laughing and gyrating, their sandy countenance shape shifted and changed colors.

Organ music growled from inside and met us in the vestibule clad in a gold-

colored mist; my whole body hummed with each note and my breath paralleled the crescendos of the music. The maniacal organist, who I saw laughing and skeletal in my peripheral vision, pounded the ivory keys with skinless fingers.

Seated in the nave, the procession cross, flanked by figures of floating arcana - tarot card figures dressed in velvet and opals and jointless jacks of spades and diamonds, dripped with blood as it passed. As is the tradition, I bowed, so low that I hit my head on the pew in front of me. It was a solid-oak epiphany that caused my friends to hoot like owls and me to realize the reason for Chia Pets.

I realized, as the celebrants ascended the altar, that the candles around them were alive and made sounds like the seductive hum of a lover. The statuary shed their symbolic clothing and danced like Woodstock hippies, smiling pointed teeth and wagging their tongues obscenely at us. From the right side of the altar Mother Mary came to me and I nearly had an orgasm. I tried to apologize to her, "I'm not even Catholic." The glow of candle light swirled around her maiden's head as she smiled approvingly and took off her veil.

Father Pajak appeared between us like a miracle. He worked an oversized Lucky Strike cigarette in his mouth and smoke poured into my eyes like liquid. No sound came from him but I had to grab my ears as he mumbled words whose echo caused ripples in the air. Long strands of web wrapped themselves around

us pulling us along, out of our pews and outside of the church. We were carried out to the sidewalk by waves of organ breeze coming out of the huge brass pipes that waved like a wheat field.

On the sidewalk outside, as a part of a white water rafting crew, I paddled fiercely with the waves as we made our way to the parish hall. Father Richard rode behind me and cupped my ass-cheeks with his hands, helping me along over the rocky rapids that nearly threw us to the curb. Our crotches were soaking wet by the time we got there. Low-riders cruised along with us in the streets, boat-sized yellow Chevys with red fur interiors. Wild timbales accentuated Santana's guitar riffs as Latina girls danced in the back seats.

The parish hall was mainly a bingo parlor and the home to the Catholic Men's Club. They received daily shipments from brewery distributors, met by the priest's black Ford and the nun's black Ford station wagon, taking their tithe, and disappearing as fast as they had come. The hall was the size of two basketball courts and was now filled with chairs and tables of food provided by the Catholic Mother's Club. The hall was most often used for gambling nights said to be held to fund the church. A moveable stage filled one of the short walls and from it large speakers sent streams of tentacles out to us in the form of some Barbara Streisand song that made small but inevitably deadly nicks on

my skull. Seated at King Arthur's Round Table, somebody began passing a fifth of Old Grand Dad around underneath the table so we could fill our soda cans. I drank my soda down fast to empty it and brown foam shot from my ears. After filling my can with cheap whiskey, Moses wielding a machine gun splintered the area to each side of the stage, sending fragments of Streisand's notes bleeding to the floor. The acid was turning violent and I knew I had to fight the tendency to follow it.

Father Richard, dressed like Dr. Frank-N-Furter from the Rocky Horror Picture Show, strutted on the stage and said we had a treat this evening, "We have a live band for your entertainment tonight." He said it was a local band that played dances and outdoor venues and...it started to sound familiar. "Bent Halo!" He looked at our table and gave us a full-toothed donkey laugh. His voice reverberated under the table and melted the can in my hand. Old Grand Dad whiskey vapors wafted up from the floor; they filled my nose like fire. "Hey, that's our band," I shouted. No one turned; I hadn't said it out loud. "Nobody told me I was going to have to play on acid!" I am not sure if I said that out loud either, but the other four members of the band seemed to think it was funny because their heads expanded like beach balls and then deflated with deafening whistles.

Apparently, they all knew as they floated toward the stage.

Big Mike, our bassist and sound man, led me to my drum kit which he set up for me better than I could and positioned my zombie-body in front of the throne. He walked away in slow-motion, growing in size with each step, toward the board that controlled the sound for each instrument. Seven thousand rippling drum heads stared back at me like eternal eyes, reflecting the red, green and blue stage lights in their acrylic orbs. A thousand winking cymbals shimmered. Two drumsticks appeared in my hands, writhing like snakes and I recoiled as they tried to bite. They were black mambas, licorice death. As strange as it all seemed I knew, I always knew, that that drum kit was my savior and playing it took me somewhere else, away from this Chicago ghetto.

Our beginning set began with Aerosmith's live version of 'Train Kept a'Rollin'" It began with a snare drum run simulating a train's steam engine sound, played by increasing tempo and volume. It was enough to cramp your hands until you had practiced it a thousand times. I had snakes for sticks and now, tree bark growing on my hands and arms that attracted flocks of woodpeckers. Huge Pileated Woodpeckers with bobbing red crests moved in slow motion and weighed heavily on each arm. Black, railroad spike beaks plunged into each arm with the rhythm of my strokes. The guitar began, whaaaa-whaaa, like a train whistle, and I continued my run on the snare, slow at first, hard to shake the

birds that fought to hang on, heavy bark splintering as they frantically stabbed at my arms. Ron's horse hair shook over the guitar neck as he played, his right hoof tapping time as his Centaur body rocked from side to side. As I shook the birds off and the flow of music started coursing through me, my hands grew light and fast, my speed picking up, the train gaining speed, and power, the steam whistle blew through my body, whaa-whaa, and everyone was set to join in with the main part of the song. It began with the end of the train's speedy beginning and a thunderously lonely double-flam on the floor tom. What played through me, I realized, is what played through everyone if we would let it. We all have it: God in us.

I disappeared into the depths of the twenty-two inch floor tom and played in dreams for hours. The acid wore off slowly, steadily; regular visions invaded my new reality.

The next day, I longed for the brief visions to again come in; I welcomed them hungrily as I picked small bits of wood and feathers from my clothes.

Half-Euntho

Summer Perkins

WITHOUT WORDS

At the burial of my grandfather
the air cut the crowd like
a thick layer of ice.

As I stood on the soft clay dirt
my heel-tipped shoes
sunk toward the corpse beneath me.

Another body
I didn't know
hugged
me and I struggled to hide
the automatic tears
that wished to escape.

I held my breath
as my brother
rested his head on the gold-tinted,

metal casket lid
to weep.
There were no words
to speak.

I walked with awkward grace and placed
my hand on his shoulder.
I pulled him back.
I wanted to say
something inspirational. Instead,
I said nothing
and held
him beneath the cloudy sky.

Before long, the dirt
filled the grave;

there were no last words before
he was no more.

THE DOOR

I visit my grandmother
in her home broken
by death.

She can't remember
my name.

She asks when he will
walk through
that door again.
I tell her, "Any moment
now." She smiles
I'm all about
half-truths.

I take her wasted hand
in mine. I focus
on her beating pulse.

Her hands used to
be warm, she says.

She acts like
a child
lost
She wants to listen to the music
on the screen.
As it flickers
light I catch her staring
at the door expecting him
any moment now.

紫薇

姚思佳

七月阿拉巴马的土地上到处绽放的是江南的精灵，
那一簇簇的色彩，过去，于我太繁复，
在异乡却显得格外独特迷人。
白的，红的，粉的，紫的，如此绚烂和热烈，
那美，最是在阳光下随风飘扬的一阵落花，如雪花，如红尘，如恒河胸前的花环。

细雨中的一地落红，深蓝色的雨和墨绿色的泥土，
幽径上的你饱含东方哲学和情怀——如此清雅，玄密，接近永恒和来处。

那样的美，为何只有在落地后才焕发出呢？
那光芒如同昙花，
被曲解的美最是委屈的，
千年前的那个少女，手拿荔枝，如同初见。

Ziwei (Crape Myrtle)

Sijia Yao

The Spirits from China is ubiquitous in July Alabama,
Its glaring color, to me in the past was too heavy and superfluous,
But is uniquely enchanting now when I'm thousand miles away from home.
White, scarlet, pink, purple, so splendid and vigorous,
There is no paradise on earth equal to a gust of falling petals in the golden sun,
Light and pure as snow;
Warm and brilliant as red wine,
Mysterious and exotic as wreath of Ganges.

By the old stone castle lies Ziwei sparsely,
Companied with blue drizzle and dark green soil,
On the green-lichen hill steps filled with your oriental philosophy and affection,
purely innocent and profoundly mysterious,
Close to eternity and Being.

Why is beauty revealed when it touches the earth after falling?
That light is as ephemeral as night-booming cereus.
Distorted beauty,
what a grievance!
That girl holding lichee thousand years ago is standing under Ziwei as real.

Cigarette at Sunset
Ginda Folkerts

I lean slowly against the red bricks of my house, feeling
the waning heat of the day seep into my body.

My muscles purr at the warmth of the rough bricks.

As the sun creeps downward, I reach for my cigarettes,

my lighter. My eyelids give me a lazy view of the sun dominated
horizon as I reverently place a cigarette into the alter of my mouth.
My lips relax and the cigarette dips downward to receive the flame
which the lighter bestows, a willing acolyte.

The ceremony begins, I inhale the smoky calmness
musing at the toxic, carcinogen filled price of relaxation,
briefly. My eyes focus on nothing and my mind releases
its terrible grip on assignments, frustrations, house hold chores

I experience smoldering relief, while a dingy halo floats above me.

The Toothbrush

Brett Leslie

Lately, when I examine myself in the mirror, I see signs of aging. Crow's feet have begun digging their ditches underneath my eyes. Strands of gray hair dot the side of my head and my teeth show significant discoloration. I need to stop smoking.

Obvious years of neglect have soured my appearance. My pecks are laughable, wilting, and mushy. They could easily fill a small A- cup. I assume my fourteen-year-old girl breasts are from neglect, but I can't justify going to the gym for self-righteous activities like lifting weights. *Even my arms have begun turning a bit flabby. I hope I don't end up with bat wings².*

I continue with the rest of my morning regimen: brushing my teeth, then going number two. But during the course of wiping, I'm reminded of a lingering problem—my chapped baby ass. The tube of prescription strength Zim's Crack Cream was bone dry, so I applied a heavy coating of Johnson and Johnson's baby powder. Joanna walked in and without asking proceeded to use my toothbrush.

"That's disgusting. Why wouldja do that?" I asked, sitting up off the commode and shaking off white remnants.

2 The extra skin left under the arm after gastric by-pass surgery like that of Jackie from the Discovery Channel program 627 Pound Woman.

“Do what?” she questioned.

“Brush your teeth with my toothbrush!”

“I thought it was mine.”

“Well it wasn’t, and I haven’t brushed my teeth yet either.”

“It’s no big deal, Malik...I share my toothbrush with my brother all the time,” she said.

“Yeah, but you could get hepatitis or AIDS that way.”

“I don’t believe that. Sharing toothbrushes and drinking after people makes my immune system stronger,” she replied.

“Well I like to keep my germs to myself and would prefer it if others kept theirs.”

“That’s why you’re sick all the time. Your immune system is innocent.”

Joanna exited the room right before I tossed the infected toothbrush into the tiny, yellow-stained trash can next to the toilet. Her voice fading, she suggested we go to Fred’s to buy art supplies. *The timing of her announcement couldn’t have been better.* “Sure, I need to refill my prescription and get a new shower curtain liner anyways,” I replied.

Inside Fred’s, Joanna took off toward the stationary aisle in search of paints, brushes, and markers, while I went to inquire about my prescription. Questions

of egotism filled my head as I impatiently stood at the elevated counter, waiting for the pharmacist to acknowledge my existence. *Why do pharmacists feel the need to stand on an elevated slab of floor? Do they get off on the high altitude?*

Thankfully an attractive young pharmacy tech came to my assistance and typed my pertinent information: name, date of birth, and insurance. “Mr. Albatross it looks like you have one refill left. If you don’t mind waiting, it’ll be just a few minutes.” I hate waiting, but it comes with the territory, and her sensuous foreign accent could have convinced me to do almost anything. So, temporarily under her spell, I filled out a customer survey in exchange for a free mail-order toothbrush and Colgate coupons. She thanked me for participating, and upon completion, I went in search for a new shower liner and toothbrush.

During the walk down the home accents aisle, I was intrigued by a loose copy of the National Enquirer lying in the middle of the aisle. The March issue contained a confession from Whoopi Goldberg entitled *Whoopi’s Wetness Woes*, where she addresses the American taboo of openly discussing LBL (Light Bladder Leakage). After finishing the article, I grabbed a shower liner and trudged to the hygiene aisle. I browsed the toothbrushes until I came across the exact toothbrush I had at home, a green Colgate medium bristle with a tongue scraper on the head.

Joanna rounded the end cap on the neighboring aisle as I slid the toothbrush inside the left sleeve of my pull-over. I knew if she saw the toothbrush she would get upset and cause a stink right in the middle of the store over my anal retentiveness toward germs.

“Malik Albatross, your prescription is ready,” called out from the speakers overhead, interrupting Toad The Wet Sprocket’s soft rock hit *All I Want*³. “Are you ready?” I asked. She nodded, but on the way she was distracted by *Rocket Power* and *The Angry Beavers* themed coloring books. I knew if I didn’t get her away from the crayons and watercolors soon, we were bound to be in the store longer than necessary.

“Joanna come on, let’s go!”

“Hold on a second. I can’t decide which one to get.”

My claustrophobia ballooned as the narrow aisles slowly began closing in tighter and tighter. It was as if I was a piece of pipe in a vice stand and God was

3 If the name doesn’t ring a bell then maybe the lyrics to the chorus will help: “All I want is to feel this way to be this close, to feel the same, All I want is to feel this way the evening speaks, I hear it say.” If this still wasn’t enough to jog that memory of yours, then consider yourself lucky. But if you love a good laugh, then immediately STOP reading this and run to a computer. Log on to Youtube and search for Toad The Wet Sprocket All I Want. This delightful little ditty, which obviously influenced the Goo Goo Dolls, is sure to repress any anger, frustration, and disappointment, to help rekindle that fading romance.

turning the lever squeezing me.

“Joanna, I’m not kidding, let’s go! I can’t take it in here anymore!”

The toothbrush, holding its ground in my sleeve, could not have been the furthest thing from my mind. At the exact moment I nervously bit the nail on my left index finger, the toothbrush dropped to the floor, directly in front of Joanna. She looked at it and said nothing. Her silence during checkout and the entire trip home made it known that she was disappointed. I pretended it didn’t bother me, tuning the stereo to iPod, and selecting Pere Ubu’s *Non Alignment Pact*.

ONE WEEK LATER.

After a week of the shower liner collecting dust, unopened, on the rack behind the bathroom door, I decided to hang it up before I did anything else. It was morning and Joanna was still sprawled across the bed. As I finished hanging up the shower liner my stomach began to growl. I promptly went to the kitchen, poured a bowl of Cheerios, and sat down on the couch to enjoy *Seinfeld* when Joanna called out from the adjacent room.

“Come lay down with me.”

“Hold on a minute. I’m in the middle of watching *Seinfeld*.”

“They’re just reruns. Pause it and watch it later.”

“They’re not reruns to me, and by now, you should know that I can’t pause a video right in the middle of it. I have to finish it!”

Living as a financially unstable college student I didn’t have cable, but fortunately an unsecure wireless network emitted enough signal on a daily basis, enabling me to use a torrent based website to download all nine seasons of *Seinfeld*⁴. I finished eating my Cheerios and completed the last minutes of episode 51, “The Fusilli Jerry.”

Amid returning to bed, Joanna threw the covers over us and slid her cold alligator hands across my belly. Her worn and rugged hands made me feel weak and frail like she was the breadwinner of the house, roping cattle all day, while I attended some second-rate university, aspiring to be a writer. But her hands weren’t in this condition because she labored day and night. They were in such bad shape because she had ichthyosis⁵. Without hesitation, Joanna stuck her hand down my pants and whispered, “We didn’t get to have sex last night.”

4 I watch Seinfeld every day, sometimes even two or three times a day. Some may consider this odd or a bit obsessive, considering the final episode was in May of 1998, but as a kid my parents would hog the TV, watching *Touched by an Angel* and *Coach*.

5 The skin is usually rough and scaly. Often times referred to as Fishskin disease.

“I know. I was too drunk and tired.”

“You shouldn’t have taken that Xanax.”

“Well, you gave it to me.”

She took hold of my hand and shoved it between her legs. We fooled around for a bit each giving the other hickeys; she on my neck and me on her breast. The foreplay got dated after a few minutes, so we just did the damn thing. Afterwards, we lay in bed smoking cigarettes.

“Malik, what do you think the future will be like?” Joanna asked.

“Oh, I dunno.”

“Come on Malik, tell me. I’ll tell you what I think.”

“All right, if it’ll shut you up. I believe all this talk of chips implanted in human heads is completely misguided. Instead, I think it’ll be cow tags on our ears and people will be branded with a number. The government will halt production on all scissors so humans can’t cut the tags and there’ll be no sharp edges. Triangles, squares, and rectangles will all be eradicated from the English language.”

“That’s ridiculous. Why can’t you ever be serious about anything?” she asked.

“Oh and I forgot, bluegrass will be banned from the air waves, because it distracts farmers from their work,” I said.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about complete and utter mind control. I’m talking about the human race becoming a bee hive. We’re moving towards a day when people will know nothing but work. In the future, if the government catches you out drinking, dancing, and not producing goods, you’ll get arrested.”

Joanna blew a cloud of smoke in my face and put out her cigarette in the frying pan ash tray I had stolen from Waffle House. “I’m taking a shower,” she said, crawling across my abdomen to the edge of the bed. She grabbed a half empty can of beer sitting on the night stand and poured it on my head. “You bitch!” I screamed, picking up *War and Peace* off the floor. I threw it at her as she rounded the corner, but it missed its target, striking instead, the dead end road sign hanging from the wall just above the Abbey Road poster. I chased her down the hallway and just as I stepped on the paisley patterned rug, it surfed me across the hardwood floor. I maintained my balance until I reached the linoleum kitchen floor, where I tried stopping myself by grabbing the door frame. But the momentum of my lower body went forward and I crashed flat on my back. I could hear Joanna slam and lock the door to the bathroom.

I’ve never hit a girl. I was raised not to, but I wanted to this time—something fierce. I banged and pounded on the door, nearly busting a hole in it, but

Joanna wouldn't budge. We barked and yelped at each other for nearly fifteen minutes, trading petty remarks about each other.

"Your teeth are crooked and your armpits constantly sweat," Joanna said.

"I can't help it... Proctor & Gamble has yet to develop a strong enough deodorant to cure my wetness problem. At least my ass doesn't look like the foundation of a house that's been picked up by a tornado and shifted about fifteen degrees!"

"Fuck you, Malik. You're self-conscious, obsessive compulsive, and freakin' crazy."

She wasn't the smartest girl I had ever dated, but in one aspect, she was right. I was self-conscious about my appearance and maybe a bit OCD, but I was not crazy by any stretch of the imagination. It was then I realized I didn't want to be alone, that I needed turmoil, violence, and regret. I needed her. I gave her a simple half-hearted apology, and that's all it took for her to open the door.

"You know, I still got an hour left until work, if you wanna go again," she said. I didn't really have the desire to, but I thought *what the heck, it's only three minutes of my life.*

"Hey, let's do it in the shower," she said.

"Okay, but let me brush my teeth first. I got cigarette and Cheerio breath."

“It doesn’t matter. Just brush ‘em afterwards.”

We went into the bathroom, and immediately upon turning on the bath water, I was doused with cold water.

“Dammit, Joanna, you left the freakin’ diverter knob up, and now my hair is wet.”

“What does it matter? You’re about to get in the shower anyway,” she said.

“That’s not the point. I hate surprises.”

We both undressed. Our flaws were completely exposed under the bathroom light—the stretch marks on her breast and my chapped baby ass. We were leaving nothing to be desired. No imagination needed. Stepping into the shower, Joanna hiked her leg up and propped it on the tub’s edge and clutched my left thigh, pulling it toward her. I almost slipped and fell but managed to catch myself, grabbing the window ledge above me. We readjusted and tried again but our heights didn’t match. She’s about 5-foot-4, and I’m 6-foot-2. I had to bend my knees in a squatting position and pretend as if I was sitting in a chair. My knees trembled and hurt from the awkward positioning. Meanwhile my pickle struggled to find the jar, slipping and missing, poking her in the belly button.

“Malik, if you can’t get it right, then let’s just lie down in the tub and try it,”

she said.

“I’d love to do that, but there’s one problem. I can’t fit lying down either, my legs are too long.”

“Well what are we gonna do?”

“Just turn around. It’ll be much easier from behind.”

Joanna repositioned herself, but there was a new problem: the newly acquired shower curtain liner was a piece of shit. It flapped in the water’s breeze like a square of Saran Wrap and stuck to my hip, wrapping itself around my leg. I peeled it off, but it latched on to my back like a sweaty t-shirt during a dog day summer in Alabama.

“That’s it. Later on this afternoon, when I get outta school, I’m gonna buy a new liner. I’m gonna buy one that’s heavier and has suction cups on the bottom,” I said.

Joanna looked at me with a scowl, and I could tell in her eyes she was livid with me.

“What the hell is your problem?” she demanded.

“My problem is that damn...”

Joanna put her hand over my mouth.

“For one moment will you let me talk? Why are you busy complaining about

the freakin' shower liner when I'm basically throwing myself at you? Can't you see that?"

"So what? You're always throwing yourself at me. Later tonight, you'll be shoving your hand down my pants and biting my ear," I said.

The water began to turn cold, so I turned it off. I had successfully wasted gallons of water. And for what purpose? I had neither bathed nor came.

"But you like it when I do that, don't you?" she said.

"Not particularly. You do it so often that it's become somewhat stale."

Joanna's eyes lit up, and she pushed me over the tub's edge. I tumbled backwards carrying the shower curtain, liner, and rod with me. I landed upside down in some contorted yoga position with my feet propped against the bathroom door. I was a little woozy but managed to untangle myself from the wreckage. Joanna screamed and threw the toilet brush, striking me square across the face.

"Jesus tap dancin' Christ Joanna. You go and push me out of the tub and then have the audacity to throw the disgusting fuckin' toilet brush at me!"

"Well, sometimes you piss me off with your snappy little remarks," she said.

"You asked me if I liked it when you nibbled on my ear, and I said I didn't. If you don't wanna know what I really think, then don't ask," I said.

“Fine then, I’m not gonna tell you anymore who flirted with me at school.”

“Good, I don’t ask you to discuss that with me anyways.”

“You know what, Malik? I could kick your skinny ass, but I know a better way to get back at you.”

“Whatever, you’re not clever enough to get back at me.”

She shoved me aside on her way out the bathroom, knocking my elbow into the towel rack. I dropped to my knees grimacing in agony, massaging and flexing my elbow. But the sound of Joanna’s inelegant strut quickly returned. She was holding my large drawing pad and snickered, “Watch this.” Puzzled, I followed her into the bedroom and noticed a toothbrush and a tube of paint in her hands. Before I could stop her, she dipped the toothbrush in the paint and went Jackson Pollock on one of my charcoal drawings.

“Joanna, please tell me you’re not using my toothbrush to spatter paint on my drawing.”

“I sure am,” she said.

I sprinted back to the bathroom, hoping and praying to see my toothbrush behind the faucet of the porcelain sink. It was gone, and I heard the front door open and shut.

“Joanna, where the fuck do you think you’re going!” I yelled, storming into

the bedroom.

“Nowhere dear, the mailman just arrived.”

“Oh great, did he come bearing gift wrapped doctor bills?”

“Nope, it’s a Colgate toothbrush and coupons.”

Joanna thought it would be cute to play carrot-on-a-stick by waving the toothbrush in my face.

“Give me that damn thing!” I called out.

Joanna and I wrestled around the apartment, banging into the beige walls and knocking over the frying pan ashtray. Trading the upper hand, we rolled around on the hardwood floor covered in cigarette butts and ash. One moment Joanna would have control, the next, I would. We tugged and pulled until our momentum flung our bodies onto the bed. The morning sunlight cut through the blinds, illuminating a halo around the toothbrush. Both of our hands firmly gripped the toothbrush as if it was a holy sacrament raised in matrimony to God. Gasping for air, on both knees, we rested our foreheads together. We had come to a stalemate.

“Look at us. What are we doing?” Joanna asked, her breath next to mine.

“I dunno. What are we doing?” I questioned, returning the favor.

“Eww, your breath does stink.”

“I told...”

But before I could finish, Joanna once again interrupted me. This time, however, it wasn't to yell at me. It was so she could lay me on my back and straddle my torso. Her long straight black hair tickled my bare chest as she teased me with soft wet kisses around the naval. Commence make up sex. Amid the mechanical back and forth thrusting, the forgotten toothbrush appeared just out of arms reach. Joanna had her eyes closed, so I made quick of it, extending my right arm to near dislocation. Luckily, my fingertips made enough contact to move the toothbrush into arms reach, before Joanna re-opened her eyes.

“Malik, what are you doing?”

“Nothing, sorry. The comforter was rubbing my knee raw.”

“Okay, but please don't stop. I'm almost there,” she requested, closing her eyes again.

It was now or never, so I made my move. Stretching my arm out, I seized the toothbrush and shoved it in a random pants pocket around my ankles. When we finished I rolled over and proudly blurted.

“I told you so.”

“Whadja tell me?” She asked.

I reached into my pants pocket, retrieved the procured toothbrush, and showcased it like Vanna White. “I toldjah you’d be throwing yourself at me.”

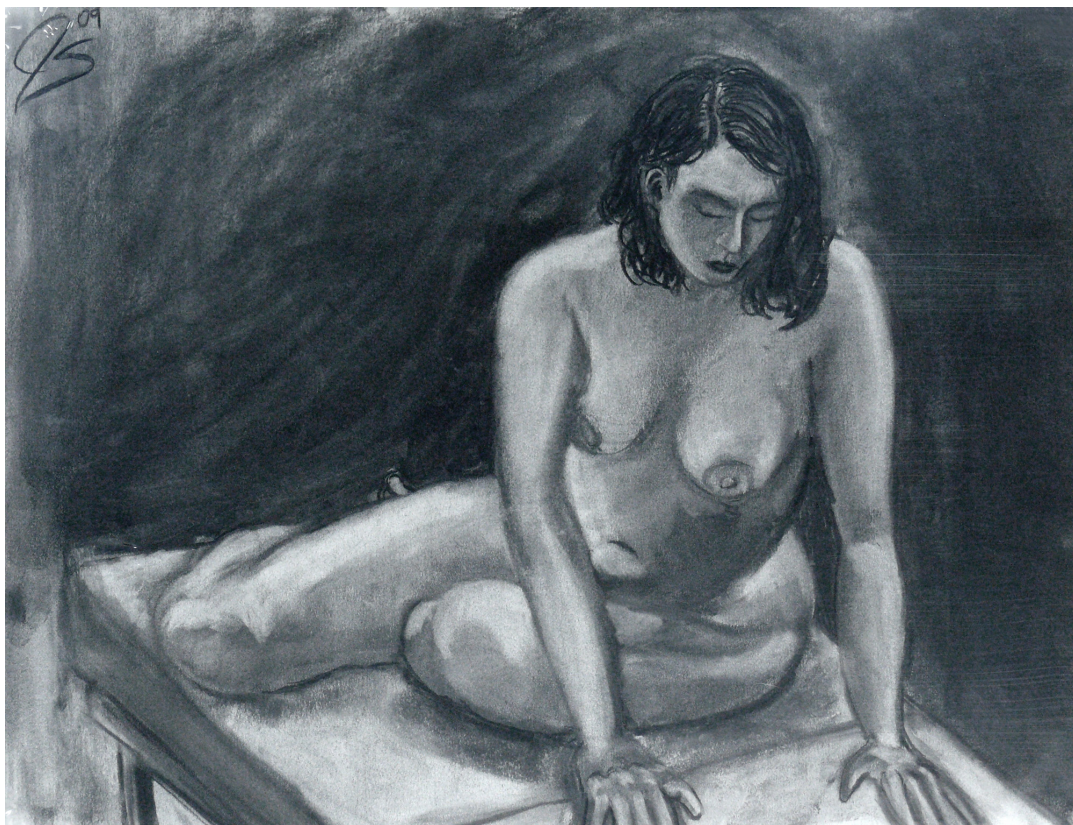
Still Life
David Sercel



Merit Award, Painting Acrylic

Composition 0.2 Female Nude

Joey Stephenson



Merit Award, Charcoal Drawing

Significants

Lisa Anderson

Poetry Award

Rancid smoke lingers
 while his cigarette fumes
from the yellowed-butt,
 passing one-hand-to-another

where Stevie Nicks rattles the airs
 in the overbearing dimness,
only crackles and slits bear light
 to physiques, in this small, warm room

words are seldom spoken
from my mind,
 so much stretched
out of its limits,
 and so little turns-

not enough, to trust
his touch, or more
force from his body
 hardened within me

I'll ravish anything,
not to miss something
ravishing enough
like you-

in your way of coming
and illuminating
with lucid touches,
these spark our universe a fire

where this match
appears to be significant
enough-
for us.

